

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 8 #40, July 23, 2021; 14 Av 5781; Vaetchanan; Shabbat Nachamu 5781; Tu B'Av Shabbat

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

Mazel-Tov to Daniel and Danielle Kahane and family on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Jacob Michael Kahane this Shabbat at Chabad of Aventura, FL!

Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD invites the public to join a special SEED program, two weeks of classes, lectures, and panel discussions appropriate to the season (no charge).

Schedule: <https://www.amhatorah.org/docs/AmHaTorah-SEED%20Schedule-5781-2021.pdf>

All programs except over Shabbat are available over Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/9446820075>. To join by phone, call 301-715-8592 and enter meeting ID 944 682 0075#. Meeting password is 009445#.

Last week we went into Shabbas dreading Motzi Shabbas and the intense experience of Tisha B'Av, the day in which we mourn for all the disasters in Jewish history. Our suffering on Tisha B'Av this year was more intense than usual, because we Jews are facing attacks in every country and in more ways than I can recall in my lifetime. One of my close relatives, who is becoming more religious, asked me how to wear a kippah in neighborhoods where it would be unsafe. (I wrote back that he should wear a baseball cap when he considered a kippah to be unsafe.)

Public mourning for Tisha B'Av ended after mid day on Monday (10 Av), and since then we have been preparing for Tu B'Av (15 Av, this year on Shabbas) – the most joyous day of the year. For more on the joyous events in history on Tu B'Av, see

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/717167/jewish/7-Joyous-Events-That-Happened-on-the-15th-of-Av.htm

Traditionally, the grape harvest started on Tu B'Av, and unmarried girls would dress in white, dance in the vineyards, and often find marriage partners. Tu B'Av is a favorite time for weddings and engagements.

I find that the weekly Torah portion often reflects the mood of the calendar. For example, parshat Devarim (last Shabbat) contained Moshe's rebukes and moans ("Eicha"). This week, Vaetchanan brings the joy of Revelation (Aseret Dibrot) and the first paragraph of the Shema (listening and constantly repeating our love for God, who loves us). How fitting that Tu B'Av always comes on or near Shabbat Vaetchanan, when we read the mitzvah of reciting (three times a day) a paragraph about loving God. God's love for us also naturally leads to the subject of love in marriage.

In speaking about love in marriage, the Torah uses the word “l’hitcheatin,” which actually means the coming together or intermingling of the families of the man and woman. Two of Rabbi David Fohrman’s colleagues, Beth Lesch and Daniel Loewenstein, discuss the implications of “l’hitcheatin.” The Torah first uses this term when a Canaanite, Shechem, rapes Yaakov’s daughter Dinah and wants to marry her. What Shechem’s father, Chamor, proposes to Yaakov is that their families intermingle and intermarry. Shimon and Levi require that all the men of Shechem’s family first circumcise themselves. Dinah’s brothers then return three days later, when the Canaanite men are in pain, kill all the men, and loot their belongings (Gen. Ch. 34). In Vaetchanan, Moshe warns B’Nai Yisrael not to mingle with other nations, because social contact leads to intermarriage. Social interaction and association with other nations would lead to idolatry – and then to B’Nai Yisrael disappearing. Moshe’s historical warning is accurate. All nations that intermarried with other nations disappeared over time – even if they were extremely large and powerful nations. Meanwhile, B’Nai Yisrael, the smallest nation (in population), has survived for thousands of years – because Hashem protects us when we observe His mitzvot.

Jews have relied on two basic methods of finding Jewish marriage partners. One method is the Tu B’Av way. Unmarried Jewish men and women gather on joyous occasions (such as Tu B’Av or the night after Yom Kippur). (My parents met at a post Yom Kippur dance, a common party in those days.) Alternatively, unmarried Jews meet through introductions (think Fiddler on the Roof) or even arranged marriages. In many Hassidic communities, parents meet and arrange (or suggest) matches for their children. In these communities, as in the traditional Tu B’Av dances, many marriages take place soon after the couples meet. Love at first sight seems to be rare, but it does seem to work sometimes. Many times, however, couples learn what the Torah says about Yitzhak and Rivka (Gen. 24:67). They met, they married, and they loved. Chazal say that true love comes after a couple live together and experience married life together. In retrospect, they realize that they grew to love each other in the way that counts, over many years.

An economist would arrange a test. Look at many marriages. Put the marriages where the couples said that they were in love before marriage in one basket. Put the arranged marriages in a second basket. Look back years later at the two groups. Which group had the higher percentage of enduring and happy marriages? Considering how many marriages end up in divorce, especially among less religious segments of society, do couples making choices on their own create successful marriages more frequently than couples whose parents have a strong hand in arranging the matches? (I would neither speculate nor bet on the outcome of this hypothetical empirical study.)

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, and his widow Elizabeth, were married for approximately 58 years before his untimely death. Hannah and I attended the funeral of and shiva this week for a dear friend, Marty Adler, z”l, who was married to his widow Harriette for more than 60 years. These wonderful people and dear friends are excellent examples of love, devotion, and religious faith in the best spirit of Tu B’Av. These are examples of the types of marriages that Moshe recommended to B’Nai Yisrael, building a family showing our love for Hashem and His love for us, within homes tied to Judaism and synagogue. The love within these families lives for many generations, as children and grandchildren remember their parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Families of this sort keep B’Nai Yisrael strong and enable our people to go on indefinitely while other, larger and more powerful nations fade away.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat

Allegra, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Parshas Vaeschanan: Cling onto Life

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky) for a Mishebarach!]

In Parshas Va'eschanan, Moshe Rabbeinu speaks to the heart of the Jewish Nation, informing them of the pitfalls and destruction caused by idol worship. Only after does he tell them, "But you, who cling to Hashem your G-d, you are all alive today" (Chapter 4 Verse 4).

What does Moshe Rabbeinu mean by that? Moshe had just told them that those who worshipped the idol named Ba'al Pe'or were destroyed. It is unnecessary to mention that the remaining Jews are still alive?

My grandfather used to tell a story:

Shimon and Yitzchok, two philanthropists in Warsaw during the turn of the century, saw the need to renovate a yeshiva building. With dedication and a vision, they planned the renovations. The cost would be 100,000 zlate, approximately \$650,000, and they agreed to split the cost evenly.

After a few months, while touring the construction site, the foreman informed Shimon that the cost would be an additional 50,000 zlate. Without hesitation, he paid the remaining 50,000 zlate to finish the project.

A short time later, Yitzchok found out about the unexpected added cost and Shimon's payment. He was extremely upset. "We had a deal!" he told Shimon. "We agreed to split the cost. You had no right to solely cover the additional expense!"

"We only agreed to split 100,000 zlate," Shimon countered. "We had no deal on the extra 50,000!"

They decided to go to the Rav who was unsure how to decide. He had an idea. At the time, the Chofetz Chaim happened to be in their Warsaw, to plead with Government officials to annul a harsh decree.

The Rav took Yitzchok and Shimon to the Chofetz Chaim to settle their issue, which he did in an amicable way.

A few days later, the news broke that the Polish government rescinded their decree.

Upon hearing of the success, the Chofetz Chaim noted: "Our victory cannot be attributed to me. Rather, it should be attributed it to Jews like Yitzchok and Shimon, who live a life with the priorities of Hashem and His Torah so dear to them!"

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l, explained, Moshe Rabbeinu was not simply telling the remaining Jews that they were alive. He was not even telling them that they survived Divine retribution for idol worshipping.

No! They were alive because of their commitment to Hashem and their support of His Torah. He was explaining how they will continue to live and prosper. Don't simply "live by the rules." Cling to Hashem and His Torah! Devote your life to Hashem and His Torah, and put your energy into Hashem and His Torah. That is how ou will prosper!

On Shabbos Nachamu, we look for comfort in this period of long exile. Moshe Rabbeinu told us the answer. Comfort in exile will not come from pursuit of anything else but the Torah.

Let us channel our energy and resources to live a prosperous and fruitful Torah life, both as individuals and as members of our communities.

Good Shabbos!

Shabbat and Fair Trade Chocolate

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

The giving of the Ten Commandments was an earth-shattering, never-before-experienced event. God revealed Godself directly to the entire Israelite people. It was the most profound Divine-human encounter to have ever occurred, never again to be repeated in world history. But while the event itself was never repeated, the telling of that event most definitely was.

The story of the Ten Commandments is the central theme of two parshot in the Torah: Parshat Yitro, in Shemot, and our parsha this week, Va'Etchanan, in Devarim. And the narratives are not the same. Almost every commentator has pointed out that the two versions – not only of the stories, but more significantly, of the commandments themselves – differ in a number of details. Some of these differences are perhaps merely of a grammatical nature, but some seem quite consequential.

The most glaring example of these differences is Shabbat. In Exodus, God declares: “Remember (zachor) the Sabbath day and keep it holy” (Exodus 19:8). Here we are told that God proclaimed: “Observe (shamor) the Sabbath day and keep it holy” (Deuteronomy 5:12). The celebrated Midrash explains that God uttered both words – zachor and shamor – simultaneously, as if they were one. This phenomenon was “something that the human mouth cannot utter and the human ear cannot hear.”

On a historical level, this midrash reconciles the two versions by asserting that both words were proclaimed equally, although we as humans can never understand how this would have happened or been experienced. On a halakhic level, the Rabbis tell us that zachor is the command to do positive mitzvot that memorialize in a concrete way the nature of the Shabbat day. These mitzvot include saying kiddush and havdalah, having a special meal, cleaning the house beforehand and wearing special clothes. Shamor, on the other hand, is the injunction against violating the sanctity of the day. We must observe and protect it by not doing any of the forbidden acts of labor on this day,

Maimonides, in contrast, offers not a halakhic, but rather a values-oriented approach to the zachor-shamor dichotomy. He notes that the differences between the two versions of this commandment are more thoroughgoing than just their opening words. In Exodus, the Shabbat Commandment focuses on Creation: God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, and thus, we too must rest. By emulating God's rest we affirm the core theological belief in God as creator. Zachor: Remember in your mind and memorialize in your actions that God exists, that God created the world.

The message in Devarim is quite different. It is not theological, but instead it is societal. “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there...” (Deuteronomy 5:15). We keep Shabbat because the Exodus – not Creation! – taught us the core value of freedom. We know that to be enslaved is to be forced to work non-stop, with no time to call our own. Shamor, in this sense, means to internalize this message; observe it; actualize it; bring its truth into the world. If we can't eradicate slavery, then we can and must do what is possible. The first step to making people fully free is making them free for one day a week. Give our slaves, servants and animals – not to mention ourselves! – one day to rest from what can be the body- and soul-crushing monotony of constant, uninterrupted labor.

At the end of Shabbat Kiddush, after starting with reciting the verses of the seventh day of Creation, we declare that Shabbat is zekher li'yitziat mitzrayim: a remembrance of the Exodus. That line goes by so fast that most of us miss it. And were we to be asked why Shabbat is about the Exodus, many of us might be stumped. Shabbat is about creation, we would say. It is the holidays that are about the Exodus, no?

The answer is no. It is also Shabbat that is about the Exodus. It is the Shabbat of the second telling of the Ten Commandments. This is the Shabbat of rest and of freedom.

Blu Greenberg once took part in a United Nations conference on universal human rights. At a certain point she spoke up and said: What about the right to rest? Both the Jewish tradition and the holiday of Shabbat teach us that no human being can be made to work constantly. Rest is a universal human right. Promoting this human right is the first step towards fighting the deep and systemic forms of slavery that still go on in many parts of the world.

In my own family, my two sons have recently begun insisting that we only purchase and consume free-trade coffee and chocolate. It is well documented that these industries in particular suffer from egregious human rights abuses, including the widespread use of true child slavery. Due to my sons' advocacy, our family now only consumes coffee and chocolate that is certified to have been humanely sourced. This is more expensive than regular coffee and chocolate (although not as much as people think), and admittedly it is just a small step in the right direction. I am under no illusions that this will stop child slave labor. And at the same time, I have come to realize that by adopting such practices or not adopting them is making a statement. Not to others, but to myself. Is this something I care about or am oblivious to? Choosing to purchase and consume in this way is for me a small fulfillment of shamor et Yom HaShabbat, of turning this belief into a concrete reality. It is a reality that becomes part of who I am and that can begin, in small steps and with God's and people's help, to change the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/07/shabbat-and-fair-trade-chocolate/>

Parshas Va'eschanan -- Can you do it?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2015 Teach 613

Following the remarkable revelation at Sinai, Hashem offered to continue communicating directly with the entire people. It was the chance of a question if do it lifetime. But the people turned it down.

Looking back at that moment, Moshe declares, "You turned me into a woman." What did Moshe mean by that?

When we consider the partnership between parents and a Rebbe, the mother in particular symbolizes the nurturing of the child so that the child has the capacity to do great things. The mother imbues the child with the capacity to love, to trust, and with the confidence to succeed. Once the child has developed these capacities, the Rebbe or mentor can guide the student to greatness.

Sometimes, the development of a child is dramatically delayed. The student may never have developed the capacity to love, for example. He may truly believe that love is something we experience with pizza or ice cream. The Rebbe or mentor will encounter a formidable challenge in guiding a student to love a fellow student or to love Hashem if the child has simply never developed the capacity to love. Similarly, if a child was not nurtured in a trusting environment, they will have trouble processing ideas of trust in interpersonal or religious applications.

Moshe was a great believer in personal potential. On a personal level, Moshe ascended to the level of personal communication with Hashem. As a leader and as a mentor of the Jewish people he believed they could do it too. Yet, when the offer came, they cried to Moshe that they couldn't do it. They felt they needed Moshe to be the conduit of Hashem's Word. Of that moment Moshe declared, "You turned me into a woman," meaning, "I thought you had already been imbued with the capacity to grow, to become great, and to believe in your potential. I thought that my task was to guide you to that greatness. But now I see you do not have confidence in yourselves. I feel like I have to start from the beginning. I need to be your mother; I need to give you the confidence that you can succeed."

I recall at one time I started an advanced Mishnah Berurah shiur in a certain community. Although it was well advertised, and the people who came were very pleased with class, very few new people were willing to join.

One day when I invited a certain man to join, I got a phenomenal insight. When asked to join the class, he replied, "Listen Rabbi, it's not that I am not committed. And it is not that I am not interested. I just can't imagine that I would be able to understand the Mishnah Berurah plus the contemporary rulings of Rabbi Auerbach, Rabbi Elyashiv, and Rabbi Karelitz. You don't really expect me to come to a class that I won't understand?!"

Indeed, I didn't want him to come to a class that he wouldn't understand. But first I would have to play the symbolic role of mother, to nurture him with the confidence that he could succeed, and that he would be able to understand the class.

For parents it is important to nurture children in basic life skills and values. Love, trust, and confidence in personal potential are qualities that are prerequisites for success. For mentors it is necessary to realize that if a student is presented to us who does not yet have such a foundation, we must be willing to take a step back and provide the mother's touch of encouragement and guidance that will make future success possible.

* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

RMRhine@Teach613.org. Teach613, 10604 Woodsdale Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20901. 908-770-9072. **Donations welcome to help with Torah outreach.** www.teach613.org. Note: Rabbi Rhine is on summer vacation and has authorized his followers to use an archived Dvar Torah until he returns.

<http://www.teach613.org/vaeschanan-can-you-do-it/>

A Balanced Approach: Thoughts on Parashat Va'et'hanan

by Jake Nussbaum *

In Hilkhot De'ot, the Rambam differed from other standard books of Jewish law, spending the first three chapters dealing with the importance of having a balanced perspective when it comes to character traits and development. In chapter 1, he explains how each character trait exists on a scale, with an extreme on both sides. For example, the trait of giving has one extreme of someone who never gives a penny to charity. The other extreme is someone who gives so much charity that he has no money left for himself. Rambam stresses that either extreme is not correct. Generally, we should strive for the "middle path." In the case of charity, one should give sufficiently, while being sure to have enough for one's own needs.

In chapter 3, Rambam addresses an issue that can be all too common. There are those who seek to avoid overindulgence and over-involvement in worldly pleasures by going to the opposite extreme, e.g. swearing off meat and wine, not wanting to get married, and wearing clothes of a mourner all the time. Rambam says that this individual is a sinner just as one would be for overindulging. He cites proof from a Nazir, who is someone who swears off wine, among other restrictions, for a designated amount of time. The Torah (Bemidbar 6:8) defines a Nazir as "holy to Hashem." Rashi comments that this is because he abstains from wine and stays away from impurity, thereby "sanctifying" his body. However in verse 16, the Torah writes that after the designated period as a Nazir, he must bring a sin offering. Why would a sin offering follow a period of extra sanctity? The explanation seems to be that it is not necessary to fully swear off pleasurable activities such as drinking wine in order to be pious. On the contrary, over-ascetic behavior is sinful.

In Hilkhot De'ot (chapter 5, halakha 3) Rambam describes a person who gets drunk as "a sinner," "disgusting;" getting drunk in public is a desecration of the name of God. Rambam criticizes both the Nazir and the drunkard, since both go to extremes

In Parashat Ve'et'hanan, there are two consecutive verses which seem to have no relation to one another (Devarim chapter 4, verses 2-3)

2. *You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you.*

3. *You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did in the matter of Baal-peor, that the Lord your God wiped out from among you every person who followed Baal-peor;*

Verse 2 is the prohibition of adding or subtracting to the commandments of God. The classic examples are that there are four sections of the Torah in the head tefillin, four corners to a tzitzit garment, and four species to be shaken on Succot. One may think that three would be sufficient, or that it would be extra pious to have five. This verse teaches us that is not the case. Verse 3 is referring to chapter 25 of Sefer Bemidbar, where Moabite women enticed Israelite men to have immoral relations with them, and convinced them to worship idols. This idol was known as Baal-peor.

Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, a prominent 16th century Kabbalist from Tzefat, suggested a fascinating idea to connect the verses. He writes that there were actually two groups of Israelites who sinned at Baal-peor. The first was the aforementioned group who were enticed into idolatry by way of sexual immorality. However, there were others who wanted to be zealous and defame the idol worship by casting excrement on the idols. But the actual mitzvah calls for the destruction of idols. The zealots wanted to sanctify the name of God by disgracing the idols and their worshippers; but they sinned through their extremism in adding to the commandment to destroy idols.

None of this is to say that there is no role for stringencies and fences to guide us to proper observance of the Torah. Rather, there is a place for strictness while not going into extremism. Rambam's insistence on the "middle path" is to be sought.

May we all achieve a balanced perspective in our character traits and in our lives.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Student at Yeshiva University and Summer Intern at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals..

<https://www.jewishideas.org/fear-or-freedom-thoughts-parashat-devarim> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Nahamu, Nahamu: Thoughts on Consolation

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Someone has suffered the loss of a loved one. We visit the mourner's home during Shiva to offer words of consolation. Upon leaving, a Sephardic custom is to say "Min haShamayim Tenuhamu," may you be consoled from Heaven. The general Ashkenazic custom is to say a passage that begins with the words "HaMakom Yenahem Et-hem," may the "Place" console you.

The Sephardic reference to Heaven is self-explanatory. But what does "HaMakom" mean? The Bereishith Rabba (68:9) indicates that HaMakom is a name of God. "He is the place of the world and His world is not His place." This phrase seems to mean: God encompasses the entire universe, but He is not limited to it. In Ezekiel's vision, the angels bless God's glory "Mimekomo," from His place. His place is far beyond, i.e., in Heaven.

Doesn't it seem strange that when we offer consolation we refer to a very distant, transcendent God? Why don't we invoke a more "personal" name of God?

Our folk practices reflect a deep sensitivity to the reality of mourning. During the Shiva, mourners are fresh in their grief. They often feel alienated from God: why has He taken the life of my loved one? Halakha recognizes this alienation by exempting mourners from prayers and blessings during the period of "aninut" (after death, but before burial). Even during the Shiva period, a sense of alienation from God lingers.

We offer words of consolation in which we refer to God as being distant, out of reach. God in Heaven will console you, God "in his Place" will soothe your grief. We know that right now God seems remote from you. We refer to God in the way that mourners are now experiencing God.

But if God is so far away, how will He be a source of consolation?

The answer is: mourning is experienced in stages. During the first stages, God indeed is experienced as being in Heaven. But as time passes, the God in Heaven will once again come close to you, will bind your wounds. This consolation is

experienced incrementally, not all at once. We are reminding the mourners: Right now, God is in Heaven, in his “Place,” but He is ready to come close, to bring you consolation. As you go through the mourning process, you will again feel God’s immediate presence in your lives.

In his classic book, “I and Thou,” Martin Buber writes of how “primitive” people use language that reflects human relationships. Whereas we tend to speak in abstractions, the “simpler” humans speak in relational terms. For example, we say “far away.” The Zulus use an expression to express this idea: “when one cries ‘mother, I am lost.’”

The Jewish tradition speaks on both of these levels. In offering consolation at the beginning of and during Shiva, we refer to God in abstract terms that describe Him as far away. But we close the Shiva by quoting the prophet Isaiah (66:13): “As one who is comforted by his mother, so I (God) will comfort you, and through Jerusalem you will be comforted.” The God of Shamayim/HaMakom, is now like a loving mother consoling her crying children.

This coming Shabbat is known as Shabbat Nahamu, the Shabbat of consolation. The haftarah opens with Isaiah’s words: “Be comforted, be comforted My people, says your God.” This haftarah begins a seven-week period of consolation, following the three weeks of national mourning between the fast of 17 Tammuz and the fast of 9 Av.

During the period of national mourning, we remember the catastrophes that befell our people during the destructions of the First and Second Temples. How many thousands of our people were murdered, or sold into slavery! How bitter have been the exiles and wanderings over the centuries! When we face the tragedies head on, we feel that God is in Heaven, in his “Place”...but not here. He is far away.

As we experience the weeks of consolation, we are reminded that mourning is a process. It begins with God being in Heaven, but goes on to enable us to restore our relationship with God as being close to us. Isaiah announces to us God’s own promise: be comforted My people. I am here with you. Redemption will come.

“As one who is comforted by his mother, so I (God) will comfort you, and through Jerusalem you will be comforted.”

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. [Emphasis added]

<https://www.jewishideas.org/nahamu-nahamu-thoughts-consolation>

Supporting Israel: Defeating the Boycotters

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The State of Israel faces attacks on many fronts. Its enemies are relentless in striving to hurt Israel in every possible way. One area of attack is in the area of economics. There are concerted efforts to boycott companies that do business with and in Israel, and to boycott Israeli products. The so-called BDS movement strives to hurt Israel economically and politically. Its actions do nothing to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but rather tend to harden antagonisms and make peace ever more unlikely.

Most recently, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream has decided to halt its ice cream distribution to Israel's West Bank/settlements. While this move will have very little real impact on Israel economically, it serves to fuel the BDS movement in their efforts to undermine the State of Israel.

Those of us who genuinely care for Israel and for the advancement of peace between Israel and the Palestinians should repudiate the misguided decision of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream. We can register our displeasure by not buying their ice cream. We can email Ben and Jerry's directly and let them know our disappointment (<https://www.benjerry.com/about-us/contact-us>) We can let family and friends know that Ben and Jerry's has made a decision that maligns Israel and undermines peace.

When anti-Israel boycotts have been attempted in the past, they have generally backfired. They have not advanced the cause of Palestinians. They have not stopped the ongoing flourishing of Israel's economy. Those companies that have joined the BDS movement have tarnished their own reputations and have damaged their own businesses.

This lesson should be learned by all friends of Israel. Let's avoid buying products of the boycotters. Let's buy Israeli products as often as we can. Let's give Israeli-made gifts to our friends and neighbors. When we hear that a particular Israeli product or company is being boycotted, let's buy as much of these products as we can, and let's encourage everyone we know to do the same. If millions of friends of Israel will resist the boycotters, we can deflect the negative campaigns of anti-Israel propagandists.

The enemies of Israel never seem to tire from their barrage of attacks and vilifications. The friends of Israel must be strong, active and effective in defeating their nefarious designs. We can play a role on behalf of Israel by defending the good name of the Jewish State. We can and will succeed--one customer at a time.

The story tells of a host—apparently a wealthy man—who throws a party and wants his friend Kamtsa to be brought to it. The servant makes a mistake and brings Bar Kamtsa—a person the host despises. When the host sees Bar Kamtsa, he orders him to leave. Even though Bar Kamtsa pleads not to be humiliated by being sent away, the host is unbending. Bar Kamtsa offers to pay for whatever he eats, for half the expenses of the entire party, for the entire party—but the host unceremoniously leads Bar Kamtsa out of his home.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/supporting-israel-defeating-boycotters>

Parshas Vaetchanah and Tu B'Av

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

In lieu of a Dvar Torah for this Shabbat, Rabbi Singer has invited several advanced Yeshiva students to participate in a SEED program with special seminars and panel discussions all week – open without charge to the public at Am HaTorah Congregation, 7609 Marbury Road, Bethesda, MD. The schedule is available at

<https://www.amhatorah.org/docs/AmHaTorah-SEED%20Schedule-5781-2021.pdf>

All programs except over Shabbat are available over Zoom at <https://zoom.us/j/9446820075>. To join by phone, call 301-715-8592 and enter meeting ID 944 682 0075#. Meeting password is 009445#.

We hope to be able to provide supplementary Devrei Torah from the SEED program at PotomacTorah.org before Shabbat or soon after. I have attended some of the programs in past years, and many are high quality and informative.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Parashat Vaetchanan

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

[Rabbi Rube is on vacation; watch for his Dvar Torah again starting next week.]

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah

Va'Etchanan: Introducing Prayer with Praise

Moses' Prayer

The Torah records Moses' pleas to be allowed to enter into the Land of Israel:

“O God, Eternal! You have begun to show me Your greatness and power. What force is there in heaven or earth that can perform deeds and mighty acts as You can? Please, let me cross [the Jordan River] and see the good land....” (Deut. 3:24-25)

Rabbi Simlai analyzed Moses’ prayer, breaking it up into two components:

Praise — “You have begun to show me Your greatness....”

The actual request — “Please let me cross....”

This, Rabbi Simlai explained, is a model for all prayers. One should begin by praising God, and only afterwards present one’s requests. We need to understand this model. Is it simply a matter of flattering God, just as one might ‘butter up’ a mortal king before making a request? Or is there a deeper significance to this protocol for prayer?

How does Prayer Work?

Rav Kook explained that the requirement to precede prayer with God’s praise relates to the very foundations of prayer and its efficacy. Following this format prevents us from grossly misinterpreting the mechanics of prayer. One might think that prayer is some sort of magic loophole built into the framework of Divine providence, and that by pleading our case it is possible to cause God to change His mind. The notion that we have the power to influence God’s will, however, is untenable.

Rather, we should view prayer as a wonderful gift which enables us to refine ourselves. Prayer does not effect a change in God; prayer effects a change in us. It is only by virtue of the soul’s moral and spiritual elevation that prayer has the power to annul harsh decrees. We cannot change the basic universal order manifested in a particular decree. But we can change ourselves. Then, as a result of our transformation, the decree is no longer relevant.

Thus it is advisable to introduce every prayer with praise of God. Such praise affirms God’s eternal nature and ensures a correct understanding of the efficacy of prayer.

Even Moses

It is noteworthy that Rabbi Simlai’s insight was gleaned from examining a prayer of Moses. One might consider himself above making such a mistake regarding the nature of prayer. Yet we find that even Moses, despite his unparalleled knowledge of spiritual matters, took care to introduce his request with praise of God. Certainly we should follow Moses’ lead, thereby ensuring that we correctly grasp the true nature of prayer.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 147.)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAET61.htm>

The Right and the Good (Va’etchanan 5775)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Buried among the epic passages in Va-etchanan – among them the Shema and the Ten Commandments – is a brief passage with large implications for the moral life in Judaism. Here it is together with the preceding verse:

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes, which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. (Deut. 6: 17-18)

The difficulty is obvious. The preceding verse makes reference to commandments, testimonies and statutes. This, on the face of it, is the whole of Judaism as far as conduct is concerned. What then is meant by the phrase “the right and the good” that is not already included within the previous verse?

Rashi says, it refers to “compromise (that is, not strictly insisting on your rights) and action within or beyond the letter of the law (lifnim mi-shurat ha-din).” The law, as it were, lays down a minimum threshold: this we must do. But the moral life aspires to more than simply doing what we must.^[1] The people who most impress us with their goodness and rightness are not merely people who keep the law. The saints and heroes of the moral life go beyond. They do more than they are commanded. They go the extra mile. That according to Rashi is what the Torah means by “the right and the good.”

Ramban, while citing Rashi and agreeing with him, goes on to say something slightly different:

At first Moses said that you are to keep His statutes and his testimonies which He commanded you, and now he is stating that even where He has not commanded you, give thought as well to do what is good and right in his eyes, for He loves the good and the right.

Now this is a great principle, for it is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man’s conduct with his neighbours and friends, all his various transactions and the ordinances of all societies and countries. But since He mentioned many of them, such as, “You shall not go around as a talebearer,” “You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge,” “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor,” “You shall not curse the deaf,” “You shall rise before the hoary head,” and the like, He went on to state in a general way that in all matters one should do what is good and right, including even compromise and going beyond the strict requirement of the law ... Thus one should behave in every sphere of activity, until he is worthy of being called “good and upright.”

Ramban is going beyond Rashi’s point, that the right and the good refer to a higher standard than the law strictly requires. It seems as if Ramban is telling us that there are aspects of the moral life that are not caught by the concept of law at all. That is what he means by saying “It is impossible to mention in the Torah all aspects of man’s conduct with his neighbours and friends.”

Law is about universals, principles that apply in all places and times. Don’t murder. Don’t rob. Don’t steal. Don’t lie. Yet there are important features of the moral life that are not universal at all. They have to do with specific circumstances and the way we respond to them. What is it to be a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good teacher, a good friend? What is it to be a great leader, or follower, or member of a team? When is it right to praise, and when is it appropriate to say, “You could have done better”? There are aspects of the moral life that cannot be reduced to rules of conduct, because what matters is not only what we do, but the way in which we do it: with humility or gentleness or sensitivity or tact.

Morality is about persons, and no two persons are alike. When Moses asked God to appoint a successor, he began his request with the words, “Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh.”^[2] On this the rabbis commented: what Moses was saying was that because each person is different, he asked God to appoint a leader who would relate to each individual as an individual, knowing that what is helpful to one person may be harmful to another.^[3] This ability to judge the right response to the right person at the right time is a feature not only of leadership, but of human goodness in general.

Rashi begins his commentary to Bereishit with the question: If the Torah is a book of law, why does it not start with the first law given to the people of Israel as a whole, which does not appear until Exodus 12? Why does it include the narratives about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the patriarchs and matriarchs and their children? Rashi gives an answer that has nothing to do with morality – he says it has to do with the Jewish people’s right to their land. But the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin) writes that the stories of Genesis are there to teach us how the patriarchs were upright in their dealings, even with people who were strangers and idolaters. That, he says, is why Genesis is called by the sages “the book of the upright.”^[4]

Morality is not just a set of rules, even a code as elaborate as the 613 commands and their rabbinic extensions. It is also about the way we respond to people as individuals. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is at least in part about what went wrong in their relationship when the man referred to his wife as Ishah, ‘woman,’ a generic description, a type. Only when he gave her a proper name, Chavah, Eve, did he relate to her as an individual in her individuality, and only then did God “make them garments of skin and clothed them.”

This too is the difference between the God of Aristotle and the God of Abraham. Aristotle thought that God knew only universals not particulars. This is the God of science, of the Enlightenment, of Spinoza. The God of Abraham is the God who relates to us in our singularity, in what makes us different from others as well as what makes us the same.

This ultimately is the difference between the two great principles of Judaic ethics: justice and love. Justice is universal. It treats all people alike, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, making no distinctions on the basis of colour or class. But love is particular. A parent loves his or her children for what makes them each unique. The moral life is a combination of both. That is why it cannot be reduced solely to universal laws. That is what the Torah means when it speaks of "the right and the good" over and above the commandments, statutes and testimonies.

A good teacher knows what to say to a weak student who, through great effort, has done better than expected, and to a gifted student who has come top of the class but is still performing below his or her potential. A good employer knows when to praise and when to challenge. We all need to know when to insist on justice and when to exercise forgiveness. The people who have had a decisive influence on our lives are almost always those we feel understood us in our singularity. We were not, for them, a mere face in the crowd. That is why, though morality involves universal rules and cannot exist without them, it also involves interactions that cannot be reduced to rules.

Rabbi Israel of Rizhin once asked a student how many sections there were in the Shulchan Arukh. The student replied, "Four." "What," asked the Rizhiner, "do you know about the fifth section?" "But there is no fifth section," said the student. "There is," said the Rizhiner. "It says: always treat a person like a mensch."

The fifth section of the code of law is the conduct that cannot be reduced to law. That is what it takes to do the right and the good.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See Lon Fuller, *The Morality of Law*, Yale University Press, 1969, and R. Aharon Lichtenstein's much reprinted article, 'Is there an ethic independent of the halakhah?'

[2] Numbers 27: 16.

[3] Sifre Zuta, Midrash Tanhuma and Rashi to Numbers ad loc.

[4] Ha-amek Davar to Genesis, Introduction.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See

<https://rabbisacks.org/the-right-and-the-good-vaetchanan-5775/>

Insight into Parshas Va'eschanan

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer

In this week's Parsha, parshas Va'eschanan, Moshe pleads with Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel. Rashi explains that Hashem had decreed (in parshas Chukas) that Moshe would not enter the land because he disobeyed Hashem at Mei Merevah by hitting the rock to bring forth water, rather than gently speaking to it.

Many of our greatest commentators, however, including the Midrash, Rambam, Ibin Ezra, and the Rogatchover Goan, are dissatisfied with the pashat, the literal or simplistic explanation of the text. They speculate on what exactly Moshe's sin was that caused him to deserve such a severe punishment, to be denied seeing his life's work come to fruition. An even more profound question is whether it was a punishment at all.

According to the Midrash, as Moshe begged Hashem to be let into Eretz Yisroel, Hashem proposed a compromise. Moshe would be allowed to enter the land if the Jewish people remained in the desert.

Moshe instantly refused.

The purpose of exiting Egypt and receiving the Torah was for the Jewish people to enter Eretz Yisroel to toil, work and engage in the physical world and, ultimately, to create a place where Hashem's presence could be revealed. This place was to be the Beis HaMikdosh, built on the very site where Avraham came to sacrifice his son, Yitzchok. What good would it do anyone for Moshe to enter the land alone?

Moshe saw that the new generation of Yidden before him, those who had not physically left Egypt or directly witnessed Matan Torah, were not on the same spiritual level as the Yidden who had experienced these miracles directly. Moshe's pleas to enter the land had less to do with his own desire to go into the land than to allow Moshe to accompany and strengthen the Jewish people spiritually while they adjusted to physically working the land after 40 years when Hashem directly provided for all their needs in the desert.

But why is it necessary for the Jewish people, or for any person, to have to toil in the physical world? What is the elevated status of the physical over the spiritual? Of the body over the soul?

Our Sages explain that humans are more dear to Hashem than the angels. Why? The angels -- the Chayos, the Ophanim, and the Seraphim, which we mention during the Shacharis service before Krias Shema every morning -- lack one aspect beautiful to Hashem: Free Will. Only humans, the lowliest of all creatures, are granted this highest spiritual gift.

Before Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, holy and unholy were as separate as black and white. There were no gray areas. However, after they ate from the tree, physical reality took on a bleak, agonizing shade of gray, with the holy and unholy intertwined in a way that is difficult to differentiate.

Through the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people were given a manual, so to speak, to dive into the gray and separate the white from the black, the holy from unholy. The Torah also gave the gentile nations, the children of Noah, the lessor but still holy mitzvot of the Seven Laws of B'nei Noach.,

In one of his talks on parshas Matos-Masei, the Lubavitcher Rebbe extends the lesson that the lowly physical world is ultimately for the highest spiritual good and therefore from the highest spiritual source. In the same way, the physical body comes from a higher source than the neshama, the soul. The neshama, the Rebbe explains, is a part of Hashem and so, like the angels, it too has no Free Will.

It is only through the physical body that humans can execute Free Will. By separating the holy and the unholy through the study of Torah and the performance of Mitzvos, we reach our highest spiritual level.

This Shabbos is known as Shabbos Nachamu, a comfort to the Jewish people after the mourning that occurred on Tisha B'Av due to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh. Shabbos Nachamu is named after the opening lines of the Haftorah for this week, "Nachamu. Nachamu ami." Comfort. Comfort My people!

The ultimate comfort is knowing that the building of the third and final Beis HaMikdosh is upon us. The Freidiker Rebbe, the 6th Rebbe of Chabad, proclaimed that the final Redemption is upon us. All we have to do is "polish the buttons," so to speak.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Moshe of our generation, continued the Frediker Rebbe's work proclaiming, "The time of your Redemption is now. All you have to do is open your eyes" to greet Moshiach.

May we be truly comforted this Shabbos as we prepare for the joyous days ahead, the month of Elul, the High Holidays, and all the festivities of the month of Tishrei. May we celebrate them with true joy, sustenance, good health, inspiration, and revealed good, both physically and spiritually, in the 3rd Beis HaMikdosh in Yerushalyim, with Moshe at the helm!

Footnote:

The Seven Laws of Bnei Noach were first mentioned in Talmud Sanhedrin. In essence, these are the laws that uphold a just society. In Judaism, one does not need to be Jewish to be holy or to be rewarded in this world and the next.

The Seven Laws of the Children of Noah:

Not to worship idols.
Not to curse God.
Not to commit murder.
Not to commit adultery, bestiality, or sexual immorality.
Not to steal.
Not to eat flesh torn from a living animal.
To establish courts of justice.

Hear the Oneness

By Menachem Feldman *

To experience life on this earth is to experience opposite extremes. There are moments of creativity, love, joy and meaning — and then moments of frustration, pain, sadness and confusion. As expressed so poetically by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes: “There is a time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing . . . a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.”¹

Likewise, when we look into our hearts, we also find opposing drives: the selfish and the selfless, the animalistic and the G dly, the inclination for evil and the inclination for good. These extremes are a source of tension that, to one degree or another, each of us experiences.

What advice does Judaism offer on how to manage these tensions? What insight does the Torah provide to help us make it through the times of darkness and confusion? In this week’s portion, Moses speaks the phrase which, perhaps more than any other, captures Judaism’s heart and soul, as well as relays its message on how to navigate the stormy sea we call life.

Moses tells us that despite the tension we feel every day, despite the world being divided and fractured, the true essence of our existence is oneness. As Moses states:

Hear, O Israel: The L rd is our G d; the L rd is one.²

This message is so radical, so counterintuitive, so life changing that we are commanded to recite these words, as well as teach them to our children, not once but twice each and every day—once in the morning and once at night.

When we recite the words of the Shema prayer, we are telling ourselves and our children that both the “morning,” the moments of life in which we feel the blessings of G d shining upon us, as well as the “night,” the moments of darkness and challenge, are expressions of the one G d.³ The Kabbalistic meaning of the phrase “the L rd (Hashem) is our G d (Elokeinu)” is that the Divine power of expression and revelation (Hashem), as well as his power to conceal and hide his presence (Elokim), are, in truth, one and the same. The difference between revelation and concealment, between good and evil, between day and night, is only from our perspective. The truth, however, is that both are expressions of G dliness. There are times when G d’s love, providence and protection is concealed, yet the central pillar of our faith is that G d’s presence, although it may be hidden, exists and pervades all of reality.

The same is true for the opposing drives within our own heart. Immediately after declaring that the core of all reality is oneness, Moses continues in the Shema: “And you shall love the L rd, your G d, with all your heart.” Rashi, quoting the Midrash and the Mishnah, explains that “with all your heart” means “love Him with your two inclinations [the good and the evil].” What is true for the macrocosm is also true for the microcosm within the heart of man. Although we feel the evil inclination and the good inclination pulling us in completely different directions, although it seems that the animal soul and the G dly soul do not share a common goal, the truth, however, is that at the core they are one. They were both created for the same purpose, and both are necessary in order for us to reach the purpose of our creation. The passion of the animal soul must be transformed to the love of G d, not by suppressing the passion but by channeling it. At its core, the animal soul wants what is good for itself, and once we teach it to develop a taste and an appreciation for spirituality, the

passion and might of the animal soul will be reoriented. Then our love for all that is positive, constructive and holy will be far greater than the love that the G-dly soul could produce on its own.

This, then, is Judaism's unique perspective: G-d is the one truth that pervades all existence and we, in turn, must create that oneness within our hearts, channeling the animal soul's immense passion toward the love of G-d.⁴

FOOTNOTES:

1. Ecclesiastes 3:2-8.
2. Deuteronomy 6:4.
3. See Likkutei Sichot, vol. 14, Vaetchanan, sichah 2.
4. See Likkutei Torah, Vaetchanan, 7:4.

* Director of Lifelong Learning, Chabad Lubavitch Center, Greenwich, CT.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4817722/jewish/Hear-the-Oneness.htm

Va'etchanan: True Individuality

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Moses told the Jewish people that in "all of you who are alive today are [lovingly] attached to G-d"
(Deuteronomy 4:4)

One might think that the more we are devoted to G-d, the more our personal individuality disappears.

The Torah teaches us here that the opposite is true: Our true individuality depends directly upon the depth of our attachment to G-d. What we normally mistake for our personality is really our secondary, animalistic side.

Since we share the same animal drives with the rest of humanity, the personality born of these drives is, at best, a variation on the common theme by which everyone lives. Thus, the apparent individuality of this aspect of our personality is in fact an illusion.

In contrast, since G-d is infinite, the avenues through which His Divinity can manifest itself through us are also infinite; thus, it is only our Divine personality that makes us truly unique. It follows that the more we allow the animalistic side of our personalities to dissolve as we draw closer to G-d, the more we allow our unique, Divine personalities to shine forth.

* From *Daily Wisdom #1*

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available.

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Fewest of All Peoples

Buried inconspicuously in this week's parsha is a short sentence with explosive potential, causing us to think again about both the nature of Jewish history and the Jewish task in the present.

Moses had been reminding the new generation, the children of those who left Egypt, of the extraordinary story of which they are the heirs:

Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4:32-34)

The Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan. They have not yet begun their life as a sovereign nation in their own land. Yet Moses is sure, with a certainty that could only be prophetic, that they were a people like no other. What has happened to them is unique. They were and are a nation summoned to greatness.

Moses reminds them of the great Revelation at Mount Sinai. He recalls the Ten Commandments. He delivers the most famous of all summaries of Jewish faith: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4) He issues the most majestic of all commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5) Twice he tells the people to teach these things to their children. He gives them their eternal mission statement as a nation: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession." (Deut. 7:6)

Then he says this: The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7:7)

The fewest of all peoples? What has happened to all the promises of Bereishit, that Abraham's children would be numerous, uncountable, as many as the stars of the sky, the dust of the earth, and the grains of sand on a seashore? What of Moses' own statement at the beginning of Devarim?

"The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 1:10)

The simple answer is this. The Israelites were indeed numerous compared to what they once were. Moses himself puts it this way in next week's parsha: "Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 10:22). They were once a single family, Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, and now they have become a nation of twelve tribes.

But – and this is Moses' point here – compared to other nations, they were still small. "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you ..." (Deut. 7:1). In other words, not only were the Israelites smaller than the great empires of the ancient world. They were smaller even than the other nations in the region. Compared to their origins they had grown exponentially but compared to their neighbours they remained tiny.

Moses then tells them what this means: You may say to yourselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. (Deut. 7:17-18)

Israel would be the smallest of the nations for a reason that goes to the very heart of its existence as a nation. They will show the world that a people does not have to be large in order to be great. It does not have to be numerous to defeat its enemies. Israel's unique history will show that, in the words of the Prophet Zechariah (4:6), "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," says the Lord Almighty."

In itself, Israel would be witness to something greater than itself. As former Marxist philosopher Nicolay Berdyaev put it: I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint . . . Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their

resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.[1]

Moses' statement has immense implications for Jewish identity. The proposition implicit throughout this year's Covenant & Conversation is that Jews have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers because we are all called on to be leaders, to take responsibility, to contribute, to make a difference to the lives of others, to bring the Divine Presence into the world. Precisely because we are small, we are each summoned to greatness.

Y. Agnon, the great Hebrew writer, composed a prayer to accompany the Mourner's Kaddish. He noted that the children of Israel have always been few in number compared to other nations. He then said that when a monarch rules over a large population, they do not notice when an individual dies, for there are others to take their place. "But our King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He ... chose us, and not because we are a large nation, for we are one of the smallest of nations. We are few, and owing to the love with which He loves us, each one of us is, for Him, an entire legion. He does not have many replacements for us. If one of us is missing, Heaven forfend, then the King's forces are diminished, with the consequence that His kingdom is weakened, as it were. One of His legions is gone and His greatness is lessened. For this reason it is our custom to recite the Kaddish when a Jew dies." [2]

Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Gandhi said: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." [3] That must be our faith as Jews.

We may be the fewest of all peoples but when we heed God's call, we have the ability, proven many times in our past, to mend and transform the world.

[1] Nicolay Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, Transaction Publishers, 2005, 86.

[2] Quoted in Leon Wieseltier, *Kaddish*, London: Picador, 1998, 22-23.

[3] Harijan, 19th November 1938.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Comfort you comfort you my nation, says the Lord your God." (Isaiah 40: 1) This Shabbat takes its name from our prophetic reading (Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of comfort.) Indeed, the entire month is known as Menachem Av, the comforting month of Av. And in the prophetic reading of Isaiah, the prophet adjures us to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, to do penance for our sins, to make a pathway for our Lord, to straighten out our crooked roads. In his magnificent lyric style, he is telling us to repent, for in repentance, we will find our comfort and our redemption.

The list of curses and punishments which came in the wake of the destruction of our Second Temple is catalogued in chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy, and followed by the call to repentance in chapter 30. But repentance and return to what? First of all, to the Land of Israel. The nation has done that of its own volition since the rise of the modern Zionist movement in the 19th century, when we stopped waiting for the Messiah and beat our own path to our historic homeland.

But this certainly also includes return to God's Torah. Which commandments should we concentrate on? Should it be the ritual, should it be the ethical, and if both, then with which must we begin our repentance? Furthermore, since we are hopeful that this time our redemption will be not only national, but universal, what is to be our message to the world?

If we could only isolate the reason why we lost our Temples, we would then understand how to become worthy of the third and final Temple (remember that the Bible only speaks of two destructions and of two exiles, the first in Leviticus 26 and the second in Deuteronomy 28). And if we could discover why God elected Abraham in the first place, it would certainly be salutary to check our actions against God's design; then at least we could ascertain where we stand in God's eyes.

At the dawn of our history, the Almighty explains that "Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, that through him shall be blessed all the families of the earth, and that God has chosen, loved, and elected him because he has commanded his children and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice (tzedakah u'mishpat) (Gen. 18:18-19) What does tzedakah mean? The Bible itself explains this when it commands us not to oppress the stranger, not to afflict the widow or the orphan, because God hears their cries and will punish us by making our wives widows and our children orphans. (Ex. 22:21-26) God in fact describes Himself as One who is gracious, who gives and loves even without cause and never expecting anything in return. (Ex. 34: 6-7)

Moreover, God repeats that when we make a loan to the poor and receive a pledge in return, we must return the pledge to the borrower if he needs it – even though the creditor actually owns the pledge until the borrower pays up his debt. The return of the pledge beyond the requirement of the law is called by the Bible an act of tzedakah: righteousness together with compassion. (Ex 22: 26)

In the first chapter of the Prophet Isaiah (the prophetic reading for the portion of Devarim, which always falls out towards the beginning of the Three Weeks of mourning), the prophet cries out that God is sated with our sacrificial animals, that He hates our monthly celebrations and festivals; it is God's will for us to rather judge the orphan and plead the cause of the widow. "Zion shall be redeemed through justice and we will return to her by means of our tzedakah, our acts of compassionate righteousness." (Isa. 1:27) Hence you see the straight line from Abraham's election to Isaiah's warning regarding the Temple: our worthiness depends not on our ritual piety, but rather upon our compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

After the destruction, the Prophet Jeremiah makes a ringing declaration which we read on Tisha B'Av itself: "So says God, let the wise not be praised for their wisdom, let the strong not be praised for their strength, let the wealthy not be praised for their wealth. Only for this is one to be praised: understand and know Me because I am the Lord who does loving kindness, moral justice and compassionate righteousness on earth. It is these things that I wish". (Jer. 9:23-24)

How do we match up to these ideals? Let me tell you a true incident which for me is a metaphor of our times. A young man attended a yeshiva in Tzfat. The first morning he arrived a bit late for breakfast and there was no milk left for his coffee. He went to the grocery, purchased a container of milk and placed the container in the Yeshiva refrigerator with a sign "private property". The next morning, the container was gone. He bought another container, on which he added to the previous sign "do not steal". The next morning, that container too was missing. He purchased a new container, adding to the sign "questionable gentile milk" (halav akum). This time no one took his container; he left the Yeshiva.

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How can we successfully pass on our Judaism through to the generations to come? In Parashat Ve'etchanan, the Torah presents us with the first paragraph of the Shema. In it we have the crucially important mitzvah "שְׁנָנָתֶם לְבָנֶיךָ – teach these words of Torah to your children". I would have expected the Torah to tell us how to educate our children

Likutei Divrei Torah

immediately afterwards. Instead, having discussed our children it moves on to discuss us. After – **וְשִׁנָּתֶם לְבָנֶיךָ – educate your children,** It says **וְדִבְרָתָם בָּבֵיתְךָ –** you must speak words of Torah, **בָּבֵיתְךָ –** when you're at home, **וְבָלְכָתְךָ בָּדָרָךְ –** and while you're on your way, **בָּשְׁכָבָךְ –** In the evening time, **וּבָקָוֹמָךְ –** and in the morning time.

So the Torah wants us to know that the finest way for us to raise our children to be proud Jews is through personal example. **וְשִׁנָּתֶם לְבָנֶיךָ –** how best can we educate them? It is through **וְדִבְרָתָם בָּבֵיתְךָ –** If we speak words of Torah every day, in addition to talking about sport, the weather, politics and so on, let's speak Torah. Let's express our pride in our tradition, let's give our family the thrill of recitation of brachot and performance of mitzvot. And this should not only be **בָּבֵיתְךָ –** when we are at home it should also be **בָּדָרָךְ –** while we're in the workplace, while we're abroad, while we're on vacation. Our Judaism is equally important to us outside of our home as it is within our homes.

וּבָשְׁכָבָךְ וּבָקָוֹמָךְ – at all times of day, evening and morning and if we are men, we must put on Tefilin **לְאַוְתָּה עַל...לְטַשְׁפָּה בִּיןְעֵינֵיךְ –** upon our arms and between our eyes. Let our children see us observing these mitzvot with pride and davening to Hashem with devotion.

לְעַל מְזוּזָות בַּיּוֹתְךָ – let them see the 'mezuzot on the doopost of our homes' so that they will be fully immersed within a happy, joyous and meaningful Jewish way of life.

Now, of course, we perform the mitzvah of **שִׁנָּתֶם לְבָנֶיךָ** through The formal education of our children and sometimes we delegate that task to others, such as when we send our children to school. But let us never forget that when it comes to the success or failure of our tradition, and the passing on of our Jewish heritage through to the generations to come, Judaism is not taught. It is caught.

OTS Dvar Torah

The Ten Commandments as a model for a healthy relationship

Rabbanit Renana Birnbaum

The Ten Commandments infuse our relationships with meaning, and provide the infrastructure for building a better home. Some food for thought on the internal code of the nation that gives meaning to marital relationships as well.

The Ten Commandments are the Jewish people's binding "internal code". They can be seen as a social model for the relationship between G-d and man, in the general sense, but I'd like to suggest a different perspective: let's try to ascertain the meaning of each commandment in how it relates to maintaining a proper relationship, the relationship we ought to strive for, between husband and wife.

3

Why is it so crucial, right at the climax of a dramatic event like the chuppah and kiddushin (betrothal), to declare the husband's presence and acknowledge him? If there were any one moment in a couple's relationship without an inkling of a doubt, wouldn't this be that moment?

Even so, both the husband and the wife must etch the existence of their spouse into their consciousness, without leaving any room for doubt. The declaration of "I am your husband" and "I am your wife" at the moment of marriage forges a proper consciousness of the marital relationship. It reminds us that the marital connection is based on something lofty and absolute, and that it isn't merely the product of a relationship and the spouses' interactions in the practical domain. There is an element of profound love between the husband and wife which should never be conditioned on anything. It must be part of the couple's life experience, just like the marriage between Hashem and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. This absolute Divine "element" must be present in the couple's hearts, starting from the moment they enter the chuppah.

2 – "You shall not have any other gods before Me"

When we begin comparing one of the spouses to "others", we leave room for doubt. In his controversial book, *Les Particules Élémentaires*, French author Michel Houellebecq claimed that the principles of capitalism and the free market had made their way into the Westerners' emotional domain and had poisoned and destroyed their emotional domain. He claims that the reason that the consistent tendency of modern people to compare their current relationships to other "products" on the "shelf of the free market" has deprived them of the ability to commit and to truly love. I believe that we must be very cautious of bringing "others" into the emotional space between ourselves and our spouses.

3 – "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your G-d, in vain"

Just as we are prohibited from swearing in the name of Hashem in vain, so, too, are we prohibited from jesting at the expense of our spouse and trampling our spouse's good name in vain. This type of behavior might seem legitimate and unrelated in a humoristic conversation. It might seem like it doesn't have any effect on the relationship, but the truth is that joking around leaves a permanent mark on our souls and can lead to serious side-effects. Rather than uplifting the relationship, it causes it to sink.

4 – "Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy"

Shabbat is when we have our encounter with the Creator of the Universe. It is also a time where we could take our spouse on a "date". Engulfed in our hectic routines and the demanding tasks awaiting us in the week

ahead, we remember to take some time off, to bask in peace and tranquility, to listen, to preserve and nurture our marital relationship, and to remember! Just as we begin our Shabbat preparations early, we ought to begin preparing for our "weekly date" with our spouse well in advance, in anticipation, and devote some emotional and practical attention to this encounter.

5 – "Honor your father and mother"

Everyone knows that when we marry someone, we are also marrying that person's parents. This is a very complex challenge requiring a great deal of thought, sensitivity and effort. It is no coincidence that so many jokes have been spun about our complicated relationships with our parents-in-law, and it's no accident that the laws about honoring our mothers and fathers include a fair number of directives that educate and guide us on how to operate in this family "minefield" – namely, how to honor our spouse's family and parents, while preserving our marriage. We mustn't forget that this complicated, and, at times, challenging pursuit of a good relationship with our spouse's parents has a divine element to it as well.

6 – "You shall not murder"

In any relationship, the greater the mutual proximity, the more each side in the relationship becomes exposed to the other side, along with the good and the bad sides of his or her personality. The masks come off, and the walls come down. Along with close proximity comes the potential for great joy and profound love, but it also comes at the risk of this knowledge being improperly exploited at times of crisis. When nothing stands between us, we can harm, trample, or even assassinate our spouse's character. In a good relationship, when one partner recognizes the other partner's weaknesses, he or she accepts and tolerates them, and even wishes and strives to support the spouse by helping him or her overcome those weaknesses when the going gets rough.

7 – "You shall not commit adultery"

It is hard to talk about adultery, which centers on our sex drive, and it's hard to talk about marital relations. Likewise, adultery spreads to all spheres of life, affecting our words, our thoughts and our imaginations. It can become a central part of a person's life, something that's hard to deal with in today's world.

Before discussing the prohibition of adultery, we must understand the meaning of marriage. Adultery is the antithesis to marriage. It represents licentiousness and a loss of control, in contrast to the restraint and meaningfulness associated with marriage. Adultery undermines the family unit, and it often destroys it. The Torah tells us that "it is not good for man to be alone", and marriage is the solution to a person's solitude. The purpose of marriage isn't virtual love; marriage produces a love that combines body and spirit. The marital

Likutei Divrei Torah

relationship is one where exclusivity is granted solely to the husband and wife who had committed to each other through the covenant of marriage. It is a love that one gives the other, when husband and wife coalesce into one entity.

The sexual urge is necessary for creating a family and producing life. There are many expressions of love, and it isn't just spiritual. One of the most important spheres in a loving and spiritual relationship is the sexual relationship between spouses. This "love" produces physical intimacy, and that physical connection becomes one of the most meaningful manifestations of the language of love. This fusion between the body's basic emotional needs and our value system creates a profound human and spiritual meaning that it infuses into the physical connection. The purpose of marriage is to take a person out of solitude. Adultery could cause a person to revert to the solitary state that had existed before the marriage. Adulterous relationships lack the deeper levels and meaning of a marital relationship, and remove Hashem from the tripartite relationship between man, woman and G-d.

8 – "You shall not steal"

Many of us have a tendency to dominate our spouse, to a greater or lesser degree, depriving our spouse of his or her independence and character. Yes – love can be suffocating! When one spouse becomes overinvolved in the other spouse's life, this can demoralize the other spouse and rob them of their selfhood. We must respect our spouses and their inner autonomy. We mustn't unwittingly rob our spouse of his or her soul. True love lets our spouse grow and maintain his or her spiritual liberty.

9 – "You shall not bear false witness against your fellow man"

How do we define false testimony? It doesn't mean that someone is telling a lie. It means that the testimony itself is false. When are we likely to bear false testimony against our spouse, whom we love? This might happen when we talk about our spouse with someone else, and unwittingly tarnish our spouse's reputation, either inadvertently or in an attempt to glorify ourselves. Sometimes, at times of crisis and rage, we are in danger of undermining the faith our spouse put in us and injuring our spouse's dignity. In these situations, the harmony between the spouses begins to shatter, and we develop the tendency to "recruit" supporters in our family and social circles, unwittingly causing harm to our spouse in the process. This is a mutual breach of trust, and our discretion has been compromised. A husband or wife must be careful not to speak ill of his or her spouse and avoid maligning their soulmate.

10 – "You shall not covet"

This commandment is all about creating the appropriate atmosphere and spiritual space

where the wrong feelings aren't evoked, or where they can be corrected. This is the path that Rabbi Avraham Ben Meir ibn Ezra took in his commentary on the commandment of "You shall not covet". He explained that it is a person's duty to engender this type of general worldview that doesn't allow envy to creep in, because envious thoughts are so far removed from it.

At any rate, one thing is certain: a person can maintain the boundaries of his or her emotional space, set red lines and use moral brakes that will help him or her reign in his lust, by directing his or her thoughts and actions, and designing his or her environment correctly. The commandment of "you shall not covet" is overlooked wherever people do not reign in their lust, and wherever people lose their moral brakes.

The Ten Commandments are about people, not about the Creator of the Universe. They infuse our relationships with meaning and provide the infrastructure for building a better home. People need to take responsibility for their own lives, lives in which the divine ideal embodied in the Ten Commandments remain ever-present, looking down at them from Heaven.

To shake off the dust and start healing Rav Noam Sendor

On Tisha B'Av, we sit amongst the ruins of Jerusalem. Though we are forever grateful just how lucky we are (in normal years) to be able to walk through the streets of Jerusalem, on Tisha B'Av, we see the city for what it is not, for what it is missing.

However, the purpose of Tisha B'Av is not to wallow in sorrow, but rather to empower us to emerge with renewed strength and commitment to rebuild this world.

This is the beautiful message relayed in the Gemara on Berachot 3a. Rabbi Yossi was walking through the streets of Jerusalem, and he entered into a ruin in order to pray. Eliyahu HaNavi waited outside for him to finish.

When Rabbi Yossi finishes, Eliyahu HaNavi asks him, what are you doing? To which Rabbi Yossi replies, I was afraid my prayer would be interrupted by those who pass by. Eliyahu says to him, "You should have stayed on the road and prayed a short prayer."

Rabbi J.J. Shachter gave a powerful explanation of this mysterious encounter.

Rabbi Yossi was a second-generation student of Rabbi Akiva, after the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students. Eliyahu HaNavi was saying to Rabbi Yossi, you should follow the example of your teacher, Rabbi Akiva, who after witnessing such great destruction, including the destruction of the Second Temple, always found the strength to comfort those around him and rebuild.

'Don't stay inside the place of ruin, go out into the street and impact those around you. Don't worry about them changing you, change them!'

Am Yisrael has in many ways inherited the spirit of Rabbi Akiva. Though we have faced horrific tragedy in our own days, we always bounce back, we always pick ourselves up, shake off the dust and start healing.

We are in deep need of this spirit. This past year has been very difficult. Illness, death, shuttered schools and shuls, worldwide social upheaval and economic instability.

In this way, I think Tisha B'Av itself gives us some level of comfort, reminding ourselves of the terrible things we have gone through on the very same day, but yet, here we are.

We have survived, and the difficulties we face aren't so difficult after all in comparison to what our ancestors faced.

However, Tisha B'Av is also a cosmic push to remind ourselves of why these disasters befall our people and what we need to address them.

This Shabbat is Shabbat Nachamu, the Shabbat of comfort, following the past couple weeks of mourning, culminating in Tisha B'Av.

Rav Shagar (Shimshon Gershon Rosenberg) zt"l, the great Israeli writer and thinker, wrote that "comfort is not healing, but rather making room for the wounds to appear, not as rage and depression that disrupt life, but the opposite, to deepen life and our belief in the good, and to refine our relationships."

Comfort is not some passive experience, a wash of relief after a trauma. Rather it is a courageous embrace of the pain whilst still believing in healing and goodness. This type of comfort and healing, like love, is hard work.

We can only be comforted when recognize just how far we have become disconnected from each other. It is, of course, much easier to be blissfully ignorant and stay in our boxes.

I have in the past related to the comfort of Shabbat Nachamu as a release from the pain of mourning and fasting. Now I see the opposite to be true.

It is a call to do something with our mourning and fasting, and not let it fade with time. We must read, in that light, the opening line to the famous Haftorah of Shabbat Nachamu as follows: *בְּמִזְמָרָה עַמִּי אַמְּלִיכָה נְחַנָּה עַמִּי* –Do not read "Be consoled, be consoled my people," but rather, "Console, console my people, says your God."

To find comfort, you must first step out of your comfort zone and be courageously open and authentic to see others who they really are and

Likutei Divrei Torah

love them because they are Hashem's people. Nothing else.

It is time for us to heal all rifts and break down boundaries and do what we can to address the injustice and difficulty that others experience. Let's be there for each other however we can, let's comfort each other however we can.

With that, I would like to bless us all with a Shabbat of true comfort.

OU Dvar Torah

Jealousy's a Hungry Heart

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

Wanting is not inherently wrong; wanting to love, wanting to be loved, wanting comfort, a nice house, fine clothes. It's only when wanting is driven by jealousy that it becomes a fault. Too often, we want things not because they enrich our lives or reflect well on ourselves and our community but because someone else has them. And the fact that someone else has what we do not eats at us. We want more in order for our neighbor to have less...

How can we ensure our wants are not driven by envy? The Aseret HaDibrot present a comprehensive map of ethical and moral conduct but it is the first and last that truly guide us here. "I am the Lord your God..." commands us to believe in God and to be aware of His everlasting presence. The tenth and last commandment forbids us from coveting, from being "envious of a neighbor's house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else that is a neighbor's."

These two dibrot are noteworthy in that they are mitzvot relating not to action but to thought and awareness. Rambam opens his Yad Hachazakah with the principle that, "the basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being." The First Commandment is a call to know, study, reflect, and discover God. "This precept," states the Chinuch, "is the great principle of the Torah, on which all depends."

Here we see that the Aseret HaDibrot are founded not on rules of behavior but on the power of thought. Likewise, they conclude with a focus on thought, with a prohibition on coveting, on envy. The Ten Commandments are bookended by commands that address our minds, hearts and intentions, not our behavior. On the one hand, we are told to use our power of intellect to reach our level of belief in God. On the other, we are warned never to use our thinking capacities to attain or gain that which is not ours to have.

They are, in essence, a perfect "yin and yang", complementary in focus and design. And yet, in these two commands a challenge presents itself. To think about something makes intuitive sense. But how does one not think about something. How does one not desire?

As Jews, we believe that the same individual who can direct his thoughts and beliefs towards God can also direct and channel his thoughts to think honestly, and more importantly, to think in permissible and practical terms. The Ktav V'Hakabalah explains that the Torah, which expects that we "love God with all our heart," intends us to use all of our thinking powers and capacities in the pursuit of God. To love God with all our powers means to use our minds exclusively for that which God would approve and condone. Otherwise, we are using part of our intellect for that which is not Godly, and therefore unattainable.

Shira Smiles suggests as much in her article in Aish.com, "Freeing Yourself from Jealousy" Let us examine the general nature of our desires. Is there a limit to that which arouses our jealousy? Consider the following parable: A simple peasant seeking a wife, due to his lowly status, has a small pool of potential candidates. Maybe he considers his neighbor's daughter, or the peasant girl down the road. This simple man would never yearn to marry the royal princess. Even if she is the most beautiful and desirable woman, he still wouldn't invest any emotional energy in longing for her. Why not? He doesn't consider the princess to be a realistic option. Royalty doesn't marry commoners like him. (see Ibn Ezra, Exodus 20:13)

She explains that our mindset is comparable to the man in the parable. We only long for those things that we perceive as being within the realm of possibility. Which, no doubt, is why we are particularly covetous of that which our neighbor has.

Judaism teaches that a person may not contemplate or desire that which he may not attain or that which is forbidden to attain. That which God forbade and restricted remains in the realm of the unthinkable. The Ibn Ezra quotes the famous Meshalim, "Would the rational, normal, poor farmer contemplate or think of physically relating with the beautiful, stunning princess? It is impossible, therefore unthinkable. Would the rational, normal, poor farmer contemplate or think of growing wings to fly in the heavens? It is impossible, therefore unthinkable."

Not to covet is a matter of training, of learning that which is impossible and therefore unthinkable. The same individual who is trained not to murder, steal, or commit adultery can be trained not to covet. Whatever is not yours, the Torah says, you can't have. Therefore, don't desire it, or even think about it.

Rav Soloveitchik observed that every morning we recite three brachos of identity, taking note of who we are. God placed our souls into our bodies, determining for us our religion, our gender, our social standing. God determined

our identity. We praise Him as the One "she'asa li kol tzarki", who made everything required for me to realize my potential. In our blessings, we see ourselves in God's image. If we look to God, we see ourselves as reflections of the divine, free of the desire for more.

Beis Halevi emphasizes the point when he teaches that if you are a genuine ba'al bitachon, that is, you have a real, direct and constant relationship with God, there is nothing other than He. Nothing happens without Him. Then you know that all you have is all you need.

Everything else is irrelevant. It is a matter of perspective – do you look at God or at yourself? To look primarily at oneself is to always want more, to covet. But to look at God and measure a life by His standards? Such a life will be satisfied and content.

Rav Elimelech Biederman notes that the verse in Devarim (5:18) where the Torah forbids us to covet, "...your fellow's wife, house, field... etc." also adds, v'chol asher l'reiach [and all that belongs to your neighbor/fellow]. Why, Rav Biederman wonders, would the Torah add those words? After all, the specifics that are included in the pasuk are more than enough to make the point. It is, according to Rav Biederman, because "all that belongs" to your neighbor includes not just these things that you might covet but also his tzaros, his aggravations, his anxieties, his hang-ups and relationship problems. When you covet, you get the whole deal – lock, stock, and barrel.

Ultimately, it is by recognizing that the grass is never truly "greener" on the other side that we teach ourselves not to covet. I remember reading about a young woman who had been born with the cleft palate. When she was a child, her mother took her for speech therapy. Often, she felt sorry for herself. After all, she had been born with this unfair challenge... then, one day as she was leaving speech therapy she happened to note a person in a wheelchair and it hit her, "I can run! I can run!"

From that time forward, she focused on what God had given her – on what she had, not on what she wanted – and was thankful for those gifts.

So, it was with the boy who dwelled in the mountains. Looking across the valley, he often found himself fascinated by a house on the opposite side of the valley. Each evening its windows were sheets of shining gold. Drawn to this seeming treasure, he made his way across the valley toward the house. But the path was difficult. Midway, he was exhausted, so he lay down and slept.

Early the next morning he hurried to the house. Instead of finding sheets of gold, he discovered

Likutei Divrei Torah

that the windows were but ordinary glass. Disappointed and bitter, he turned toward home, but then stopped in surprise. Across the valley, he saw his own home, and it was agleam with windows of gold!

Our hearts are often hungry for the meals of others. When we recognize the feasts piled high on our own plates, we would be satisfied and grateful. [Excerpted]

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Material Wealth and Its Dangers

By Rav Elchanan Samet

a. TWO SEEMINGLY SIMILAR PASSAGES
Sefer Devarim is the book of preparation for entry into the Promised Land. This is evidenced both by the halakhic parashot that are situated at its core as well as by the later parashot, which deal with the covenant sealed on the plains of Mo'av and - especially - by Moshe's great monologue in the early parashot of the Sefer. Eight times during the course of parashot Va-etchanan and Ekev, Moshe describes the imminent encounter with the land. This encounter is described from different aspects, each description accompanied by mitzvot and warnings related to the theme of that description. Here we shall compare two such descriptions, one in parashat Va-etchanan (6:10-15) and the other in parashat Ekev (8:7-20).

The general framework of these two parashot is similar: Both consist of a lengthy introductory sentence followed by the primary section of the parasha.

The introductory sentence in each case begins with similar wording: "And it shall be when Hashem your God brings you to the land..." (6:10), and "When Hashem your God brings you to the land..." (8:7). Likewise, the introductory sentences also conclude in a similar manner: "And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied." Between the opening and the conclusion of the introduction we find a description of all the good that awaits the nation in the land.

The primary section of both parashot opens with the same warning: "Guard yourself lest you forget God," and in both we are reminded that it is God Who "took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." The reason that may lead to forgetting God is the great goodness showered upon them in the land.

Corresponding to the warning about forgetting God, both parashot contain a contrasting positive mitzva: in parashat Va-etchanan (6:13) we are told, "You shall fear Hashem your God," while in parashat Ekev (8:18) Moshe commands, "You shall remember Hashem your God."

Both parashot conclude with a warning about going after other gods, and the threat of being punished with annihilation for this sin.

Thus the parallel between these two parashot exists both in their general structure and in the linguistic similarities found in corresponding places within their common structural framework.

Whenever it appears that the Torah is repeating itself, we need to look for the differences between the seemingly similar passages. It is these differences that help us discern the uniqueness of each parasha, indicating the special significance and the innovation in each.

It is not difficult to discern the basic general difference between the two parashot under discussion, a difference which in turn gives rise to all the more detailed differences: these two parashot describe two different stages in the encounter between Am Yisrael and their promised land. In parashat Va-etchanan we find a description of the initial encounter with the land, immediately following the conquest, when Israel inherit and possess all the material assets that have been created in the land by the nations that had dwelled there until the conquest. Parashat Ekev, on the other hand, describes the encounter with the good land itself, with the natural qualities that provide the basis for successful agriculture (the growth of the seven species), building and economic growth, which come in the wake of conscientious hard work on the part of Bnei Yisrael who put the good of the land to good use. Although both parashot describe material abundance and the plentiful blessings that await the nation in their land, they are different types of abundance, from different sources, and given to Israel at different stages in the process of their settlement in the land. As a result, the danger of religious corruption that this abundance may cause, as warned by the Torah, is also different in each case, as is the prescribed precautionary commandment. Let us look at these differences in more detail, dividing our discussion into a treatment of the encounter with the land on one hand and an analysis of the Torah's warnings about the results of that encounter, on the other.

b. CONQUERING THE LAND

"Hear, O Israel: You are passing over the Jordan today to go and possess nations greater and mightier than you... Know this day that it is Hashem your God Who passes before you, a consuming fire, He shall destroy them and He shall defeat them before you; you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly as God has told you." (9:1-3)

Bnei Yisrael were not brought to an empty land, covered with wild forests. They were brought to an inhabited land where nations with a material culture more highly developed than their own were living. The battle against these nations for the conquest of the land, if it lasted a long time and if it was conducted with difficult and great effort, would leave in its wake scorched earth and utter destruction of that entire material culture. But the Torah promises a great and QUICK victory for Israel over those nations. Indeed, the conquest in the days of Yehoshua is described as realizing this promise: most of the cities of the land fell into Israel's hands in their entirety, and in a speedy process of conquest. This was meant to work in Israel's favor, easing their task of conquest and settlement of the land and introducing them into a life of material abundance

immediately upon their arrival. Therefore the Torah commands, in the parasha dealing with "when you approach a city to wage war" (20:14), that "All the spoil you shall take to yourself, and you shall eat the spoil of your enemies which Hashem your God has given to you," and later on the nation is commanded not to destroy fruit-bearing trees during the siege of a city, "for you shall eat of them" (following the conquest); "you shall not cut them down" (ibid 19).

In parashat Va-etchanan, in the section under discussion, the Torah describes the great advantage in possession of the land achieved in this manner. It is not the good of the land itself that is pointed out here (for in the initial stage of the conquest this is of lesser significance), but rather the good that man has created upon it: "Great and good cities... and houses full of all types of good." In the corresponding parasha in Ekev, it is specifically the good of the land itself that is described, and also twice: "When Hashem your God brings you to the good land... and you shall bless Hashem your God for the good land which He has given you."

The abundance enjoyed by the nation in the land is also different in each of these two parashot. While in parashat Ekev water is provided by the land itself, in a natural manner (through the "rivers and streams that flow and the fountains in the valleys and mountains"), in parashat Va-etchanan the water comes from wells that have been dug out by the previous inhabitants of the land. While in parashat Ekev we are told that the land brings forth seven species of agricultural produce (requiring man to invest effort in their cultivation until he is able to eat his bread in abundance), in our parasha there are "vineyards and olive trees" just waiting for Israel. It is not the SPECIES of fruit that are important here, but rather their situation: they are already planted and are ready for use and consumption.

In parashat Va-etchanan there is mention of "great and good cities, and houses full of all types of good" that the inhabitants of the land will leave behind them. This is not mentioned in the corresponding parasha in Ekev, for these are not qualities of the land itself. On the other hand, parashat Ekev mentions the iron and copper found in the ground; these need to be mined. This, obviously, has no place in the description in Va-etchanan. The root "ch-tz-v" (to mine, dig) is reserved there for the wells of water dug out of the rocks by the previous inhabitants of the land.

To conclude the comparison between the two passages which describe the material abundance of the land, let us turn our attention to one stylistic phenomenon which exists in both and which illustrates the special subject dealt with in each. In both parashot a certain word or phrase is repeated in a fixed place – at the beginning of the sentence or at its conclusion, such that the repetition echoes in the ears of the listener like a hammer. In parashat Ekev it is the word "land" (eretz) that repeats itself at the beginning of five sentences (e.g. "a land of streams ... a land of wheat...")

Likutei Divrei Torah

and thus determines the subject of the parasha: "the goodness of the land." In parashat Va-etchanan it is the phrase "which you did not ..." that occurs at the conclusion of four consecutive sentences (e.g. "great cities which you did not build, houses full of all kinds of good which you did not fill..."), determining that the special subject of this parasha is the material abundance that is being given to the nation as a free gift, without any effort being required on their part.

c. LEST YOU FORGET GOD

What the Torah warns about in both parashot is "lest you forget God," and both mention the ingratitude that such forgetting would entail, for it is God who took the nation "from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." But a close examination reveals that the reason for this forgetting is different in each parasha, and therefore it also has a different result.

In parashat Ekev we find an account of the process that may bring about the forgetfulness of ingratitude, an account that is lacking in Va-etchanan: a person who makes use of the good of the land and cultivates it diligently will become wealthy and live a life of luxury. This will not happen immediately, but rather at the conclusion of the process of settling down in the land. (Attention should be paid to the contrast between "YOU SHALL BUILD good houses and dwell in them," in parashat Ekev, and "great and good cities which YOU HAVE NOT BUILT and houses full of all kinds of good which YOU DID NOT FILL," in parashat Va-etchanan.) The wealth and economic luxury achieved through human effort bring one to a sense of pride - "and your heart will be haughty" – and the tendency to attribute all this success to oneself – "and you shall say in your heart, My power and the strength of my hand have made me all this might."

The practical result of this is first of all that one forgets God, "failing to observe His mitzvot" – neglecting the yoke of mitzvot, as we read in parashat Ha'azinu (32:15) "And Yeshurun grew fat and kicked." It is only at a later stage that this process leads to following after other gods. What is the reason for forgetting God in parashat Va-etchanan? The Torah does not specify, but the reason is clearly not pride (for what reason can there be for pride in wealth that one did not create oneself?), nor neglect of the mitzvot. In our parasha the Torah reaches the stage of idolatry much faster. If we compare the formulation of the Torah's warning against idolatry in both parashot, we find an important difference: Va-etchanan (6:14): "You shall not go after other gods IN THE PATH OF THE NATIONS WHO ARE AROUND YOU"

Ekev (8:19): "And it will be if you forget God and go after other gods and serve them...."

The Torah's concern in Va-etchanan is that the material culture which Israel will inherit in the land of Canaan will lead to an acceptance of the religious culture with which it is bound up. Together with the "great and good cities" and "the houses full of all kinds of goodness," Bnei

Yisrael might also accept Ba'al and Ashtoret, the gods of Canaan, and the pagan concepts that are part and parcel of the material culture. In every Canaanite home there were idols of gods, and many Canaanite cities boasted pagan temples. The material culture of Canaan was saturated with pagan worship.

It is now clear what concern the Torah is voicing here: the inheritance of a material culture (Canaan) by a nation with a relatively inferior material culture (Israel) may turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory. Feelings of inferiority and insignificance may lead the victorious nation to enter the materially richer culture of the defeated nation, adopting it wholeheartedly, including its religious aspects. The defeated nation could then say, "They beat us, but they accepted our philosophy." Such a process has occurred more than once in human history.

Therefore the Torah demands of Israel that a distinction be made between the good cities, the houses full of all types of good, and the entire Canaanite infrastructure – all of which are given to Israel out of God's kindness – and the beliefs and philosophies of the Canaanites and their tangible expression. At the conclusion of parashat Va-etchanan (7:1-8) we find the direct continuation of our discussion:

"When Hashem your God brings you to the land to which you are coming to possess it, and He will drive out many nations before you... seven nations more numerous and mightier than you... You shall utterly destroy them... and have no mercy on them. So shall you do to them: you shall destroy their altars and break down their images, and cut down their asherim and burn their idols with fire. For you are a holy nation to Hashem your God; Hashem your God chose you to be for Him a special nation out of all the nations upon the face of the earth. God did not desire you and choose you of all the nations for your great numbers - for you are the smallest among the nations - but rather because of God's love for you..."

Thus, it is true that the nations that you are about to possess do have an advantage - they are greater and mightier than you. But you are a holy nation to God, and He has chosen you from among all the nations. On the strength of that superiority you are destined to be victorious over all these nations, and therefore take care that you do not lose your advantage over them - your sanctity.

What is the precaution that the Torah suggests against the possibility of deterioration in each of the parashot? In parashat Ekev the answer starts to be hinted at even before the possibility of the deterioration is explicitly discussed (8:10): "And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied, AND YOU SHALL BLESS HASHEM YOUR GOD for the good land which He has given you." In the corresponding place in parashat Va-etchanan, we are told simply, "And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied," with no mention of blessing God for this goodness. The reason for this difference lies in the fact that God's blessing in having given us the good land, which is the source of all the wealth and ease which we have

attained, is indeed a measure of guarantee against pride and forgetting God's mercies, but it has no power to protect the nation against the influence of pagan culture.

An additional precaution provided by the Torah in parashat Ekev against man's pride and forgetting God is the mention of God's mercies towards Israel during their desert wanderings (8:15-16): "...Who leads you in the great and terrible desert, with poisonous snakes, scorpions and drought with no water, Who brought out water for you from the rock of flint, Who fed you manna in the desert..." The Ramban (8:18) interprets this as teaching, "If you think 'My power and the strength of my hand made all of this might for me,' remember God Who took you out of Egypt - there you had no power nor strength in your hands at all. And remember also that in the desert, where you had no means to survive, God performed all that you needed. Thus, this might, which you have achieved by your own strength - it is God Who gives you the strength with which to do it."

This precaution, too, lacks the power to protect against the influences of pagan culture against which the Torah warns in parashat Va-etchanan. In our parasha there is no suitable precaution other than complete cleaving to God (6:13): "YOU SHALL FEAR Hashem your God, and you shall serve HIM, and you shall swear IN HIS NAME." From this verse we learn the prohibition of fearing other gods, the prohibition of serving them and that of swearing in their names.

A practical precaution against the influences of pagan Canculture is found in the continuation of the parasha, and it is repeated several times in Sefer Devarim: the destruction of the pagan nations, the shattering of their altars and the burning of their idols. These acts are a precondition to ensure that Israel will in no way remain "stuck" to the spoils.

d. A SOCIETY OF LUXURY

From our study here we may draw conclusions that apply to our days as well, and the society of luxury in which we live. Economic abundance, wealth and ease for the individual and society as a whole present two hidden dangers. One danger applies to the individual who has earned his wealth through his own efforts - a positive phenomenon in its own right - and that is the danger of pride and a feeling of human power, which distances the memory of God's mercies towards him. There is nothing wrong with the joy of creating and doing, and pride in the success and achievements that come in the wake of diligent and careful labor. But only a hair's breadth separates this joy and pride from a forbidden and negative type of pride. This hair's breadth is a person's constant memory of the true source of all his achievements: God's mercy towards him.

And thus the Ran, in his tenth derasha, interprets the verses in parashat Va-etchanan (8:17-18), "And you shall say in your heart, My power and the strength of my hand have made me all this might. And you shall remember Hashem your God, for it is He Who

Likutei Divrei Torah

gives you strength to perform might." If a certain power or talent exists within you, remember Who gave it to you. As the verse teaches, "For it is He Who gives you STRENGTH to perform might." It does not say, "Remember that it is Hashem your God Who gives you the might" - for this would deny the power that a person indeed has, as the means for gathering wealth. In other words, when a person remembers and recognizes the source of his strength and talents and Who it is that has shown him so much mercy so far, he may truly declare with joy, "My power and the strength of my hands (which are a gift from God) have made me this might!"

The other danger, which characterizes our generation, is that the society of abundance in which we live connects with many different cultures, making them into a single global culture. There is tremendous benefit in this: without any need for war and for "eating the spoil of our enemies" we are able to enjoy every cultural achievement from every part of the world; it arrives at our doorstep - or straight into our homes - without any effort on our part. The question posed to us is to what extent we are capable of drawing a distinction between material culture which improves our "quality of life," and the spiritual values of the creators of that culture.

The ability to draw this distinction in our generation, and the knowledge of where exactly the line is to be drawn, is one of the most complex and difficult tasks that we face. This is because western culture is not a pagan culture as was the Canaanite culture in its time. Some of the spiritual values of western culture fit in with the Torah and are indeed nourished by it. Nevertheless, other values stand in clear contrast to our Torah. We may run away from this task by closing ourselves off from any manifestation of this culture. But someone who seeks to address it, to extract its good while rejecting its negative elements, must pay attention to the Torah's warning in our parasha.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

Weekly Parsha VA-ETCHANAN 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Although our teacher Moshe figuratively tears down the gates of Heaven with his prayers and supplications to be allowed to enter the land of Israel, his wish is not granted. Over the centuries, the commentators have offered various explanations as to why Heaven, so to speak, remains so adamant in refusing his request and prayer.

Even though many great and noble insights have been advanced to rationalize and explain this refusal of the prayers by Moshe, the question itself remains a vexing one, even thousands of years later.

The simplest and, perhaps, least satisfying answer to the problem is simply that we can never understand or fathom the judgments and decisions of Heaven. The mortal mind can never cross the line of eternity and will always be left with questions and difficulties. All of this is encompassed in the words of God: "No human being while alive can fathom or see Me".

Naturally, we are greatly frustrated by our inability to deal with eternity on a rational basis. We are frustrated by the realization of our limitations, whether they be physical, mental, spiritual, or even mundane. The aptitude to live and function within the limitations of one's own shortcomings is a great talent, and, unfortunately, there are many who do not possess it, and are constantly unhappy, disappointed, frustrated, pessimistic and morose.

All the utopian ideas and legislation currently being promoted in much of the Western world is simply an outlet for the disappointment that is felt when one realizes that society is not perfect, and that life usually is messy.

Moshe is told by Heaven that he should no longer pursue this course of prayer. He is to give up on his lifelong dream and accept the will of Heaven, even though he may not understand or agree with the decision that is being rendered. This becomes part of the matrix of the greatness of Moshe, in that he does accept this judgment against him, and we do not find him pursuing the matter any longer.

In his closing words to the Jewish people, Moshe will refer again to the fact that he will not lead them into the land of Israel, and that he will die and be buried in the land of Moab. But these statements are not made in bitterness or in complaint, but simply in recognition of the truth of the situation that faces him and the Jewish people.

Judaism is a religion of optimism, opportunity, and multiple choices, but contains within it a certain degree of fatalism – an understanding that the will of Heaven will not be thwarted, no matter what, and no matter how mysterious it may appear to an ordinarily mortal.

In Yiddish, this streak of fatalism is expressed in the word 'bashert'. After all our attempts and actions have taken place, there still is this element that governs the outcome after all our efforts and seeming accomplishments. Such is the relationship of the created towards the Creator.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion COMFORT AND CONSOLATION Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Jewish people has searched for some sort of physical and psychological response to the destruction of the Temple, the millennia-long dispersion throughout the world, and the continuing enmity from much of the non-Jewish world and societies. Consolation is hard to come by, let alone comfort and some sense of serenity. The pain of centuries of humiliation, discrimination and violence cannot easily be replaced or erased even by the miraculous resurrection of the Jewish people and the state of Israel in our time.

We all experience loss and tragedy during our lifetimes. It is well-nigh impossible to escape this fate and its consequences. We are also aware that what we have lost is irreplaceable, and true comfort can never again be achieved. The Talmud teaches that one of the gifts that have been bestowed on human beings is that the memory and the loss of loved ones is somehow mitigated and softened by the passage of time and the events and circumstances of later life.

If it were not for this ability, not so much to console ourselves as to distract ourselves from the loss and tragedy that we have endured, it would be impossible to continue normal life after suffering from such a loss. This is certainly true on a personal level but is also true from a national perspective as well. Part of the restlessness and frustration that marks Jewish life all over the world stems from the fact that we have never been able to achieve any sense of comfort or consolation regarding the destruction of our Temple, and the length and intensity of the exile that followed its destruction.

After the day of mourning of the Ninth of Av, we read special Haftorot taken from the words of the prophet Isaiah, called seven chapters of consolation. The striking point about these

seven Haftorot is that the prophet concentrates upon the future and ignores the tragedies of the past. He does not dwell upon the cruelty and evil of the enemies of the Jewish people, and the many atrocities that were perpetrated upon the Jewish people in destroying the Temple and later generations as well. He does not attempt to erase the past or even to justify it, even though all the actions of Heaven are just and true.

In discussing the future and outlining for us the better times that will yet visit us, Isaiah's main points and themes of these seven Haftorot are the physical restoration of the Jewish people and the land of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles. It is as though we are being told that there is no use or benefit in reliving the past. Our hope and reason for continued life and success is based upon our future and its attendant blessings. The past will never bring us comfort or consolation. The paradox of life, and especially of Jewish life, is that at one and the same time, we are to remember the past and honor its memories and lessons, while at the same time looking forward to our future as the place where our energies should be focused and expended.

It is difficult for humans to look backwards and forwards at the same time. So much of the Jewish world still focuses its attention on the past, on memorials and museums. As noted above, the past never brings any sense of closure that can lead to a state of true consolation. The Talmud warns human beings not to grieve too long or too bitterly over the tragedies that have befallen us. Such is the way of the world, and it is beyond our abilities to change this seemingly natural course of events.

We are bidden to rise above our feelings and continue to be productive human beings. Our future, to a great extent, is dependent upon us and what we will make of it. Judaism searches for the path and the psychological necessity to be able to move forward in life, even when we are beset with dark memories and the sense of permanent loss.

I once heard from Rabbi Kahaneman a comment he made regarding a stone throwing incident that, unfortunately, happened in Israel. He said that stones are to be used for building and not for throwing. That pretty much sums up the Jewish attitude towards past tragedies and permanent loss. Throwing stones never leads to a better future. Building with stones always gives a sense of achievement and purpose for life, and it is that sense of achievement and purpose that holds within it the gift of comfort and consolation.

Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

The Fewest of All Peoples (Va'etchanan 5781)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Buried inconspicuously in this week's parsha is a short sentence with explosive potential, causing us to think again about both the nature of Jewish history and the Jewish task in the present.

Moses had been reminding the new generation, the children of those who left Egypt, of the extraordinary story of which they are the heirs: Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut. 4:32-34)

The Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan. They have not yet begun their life as a sovereign nation in their own land. Yet Moses is sure, with a certainty that could only be prophetic, that they were a people like no other. What has happened to them is unique. They were and are a nation summoned to greatness.

Moses reminds them of the great Revelation at Mount Sinai. He recalls the Ten Commandments. He delivers the most famous of all summaries of Jewish faith: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4) He issues the most majestic of all commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5) Twice he tells the people to teach these things to their children. He gives them their eternal mission statement as a nation: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession." (Deut. 7:6)

Then he says this:

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7:7)

The fewest of all peoples? What has happened to all the promises of Bereishit, that Abraham's children would be numerous, uncountable, as many as the stars of the sky, the dust of the earth, and the grains of sand on a seashore? What of Moses' own statement at the beginning of Devarim?

"The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 1:10)

The simple answer is this. The Israelites were indeed numerous compared to what they once were. Moses himself puts it this way in next week's parsha: "Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Deut. 10:22). They were once a single family, Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, and now they have become a nation of twelve tribes.

But – and this is Moses' point here – compared to other nations, they were still small. "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you ..." (Deut. 7:1). In other words, not only were the Israelites smaller than the great empires of the ancient world. They were smaller even than the other nations in the region. Compared to their origins they had grown exponentially but compared to their neighbours they remained tiny.

Moses then tells them what this means:

You may say to yourselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. (Deut. 7:17-18)

Israel would be the smallest of the nations for a reason that goes to the very heart of its existence as a nation. They will show the world that a people does not have to be large in order to be great. It does not have to be numerous to defeat its enemies. Israel's unique history will show that, in the words of the Prophet Zechariah (4:6), "'Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

In itself, Israel would be witness to something greater than itself. As former Marxist philosopher Nicolay Berdyaev put it:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint . . . Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.[1]

Moses' statement has immense implications for Jewish identity. The proposition implicit throughout this year's Covenant & Conversation is that Jews have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers because we are all called on to be leaders, to take responsibility, to contribute, to make a difference to the lives of others, to bring the Divine Presence into the world. Precisely because we are small, we are each summoned to greatness.

Y. Agnon, the great Hebrew writer, composed a prayer to accompany the Mourner's Kaddish. He noted that the children of Israel have always been few in number compared to other nations. He then said that when a monarch rules over a large population, they do not notice when an individual dies, for there are others to take their place. "But our King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He ... chose us, and not because we are a large nation, for we are one of the smallest of nations. We are few, and owing to the love with which He loves us, each one of us is, for Him, an entire legion. He does not have many replacements for us. If one of us is missing, Heaven forfend, then the King's forces are diminished, with the consequence that His kingdom is weakened, as it were. One of His legions is gone and His greatness is lessened. For this reason it is our custom to recite the Kaddish when a Jew dies." [2]

Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Gandhi said: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." [3] That must be our faith as Jews.

We may be the fewest of all peoples but when we heed God's call, we have the ability, proven many times in our past, to mend and transform the world.

Parshat Vaetchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23 – 7:11)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Comfort you comfort you my nation, says the Lord your God." (Isaiah 40: 1)

This Shabbat takes its name from our prophetic reading (Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of comfort.) Indeed, the entire month is known as Menachem Av, the comforting month of Av. And in the prophetic reading of Isaiah, the prophet adjures us to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, to do penance for our sins, to make a pathway for our Lord, to straighten out our crooked roads. In his magnificent lyric style, he is telling us to repent, for in repentance, we will find our comfort and our redemption.

The list of curses and punishments which came in the wake of the destruction of our Second Temple is catalogued in chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy, and followed by the call to repentance in chapter 30. But repentance and return to what? First of all, to the Land of Israel. The nation has done that of its own volition since the rise of the modern Zionist movement in the 19th century, when we stopped waiting for the Messiah and beat our own path to our historic homeland.

But this certainly also includes return to God's Torah. Which commandments should we concentrate on? Should it be the ritual, should it be the ethical, and if both, then with which must we begin our repentance? Furthermore, since we are hopeful that this time our redemption will be not only national, but universal, what is to be our message to the world?

If we could only isolate the reason why we lost our Temples, we would then understand how to become worthy of the third and final Temple (remember that the Bible only speaks of two destructions and of two exiles, the first in Leviticus 26 and the second in Deuteronomy 28). And if we could discover why God elected Abraham in the first place, it would certainly be salutary to check our actions against God's design; then at least we could ascertain where we stand in God's eyes.

At the dawn of our history, the Almighty explains that "Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, that through him shall be blessed all the families of the earth, and that God has chosen, loved, and elected him because he has commanded his children and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice (tzedakah u' mishpat) (Gen. 18:18-19) What does tzedakah mean? The Bible itself explains this when it commands us not to oppress the stranger, not to afflict the widow or the orphan, because God hears their cries and will punish us by making our wives widows and our children orphans. (Ex. 22:21-26) God in fact describes Himself as One who is gracious, who gives and loves even without cause and never expecting anything in return. (Ex. 34: 6-7)

Moreover, God repeats that when we make a loan to the poor and receive a pledge in return, we must return the pledge to the borrower if he needs it – even though the creditor actually owns the pledge until the borrower pays up his debt. The return of the pledge beyond the requirement of the law is called by the Bible an act of tzedakah: righteousness together with compassion. (Ex 22: 26)

In the first chapter of the Prophet Isaiah (the prophetic reading for the portion of Devarim, which always falls out towards the beginning of the Three Weeks of mourning), the prophet cries out that God is sated with our sacrificial animals, that He hates our monthly celebrations and festivals; it is God's will for us to rather judge the orphan and plead the cause of the widow. "Zion shall be redeemed through justice and we will return to her by means of our tzedakah, our acts of compassionate righteousness." (Isa. 1:27) Hence you see the straight line from Abraham's election to Isaiah's warning regarding the Temple: our worthiness depends not on our ritual piety, but rather upon our compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

After the destruction, the Prophet Jeremiah makes a ringing declaration which we read on Tisha B'Av itself: "So says God, let the wise not be

praised for their wisdom, let the strong not be praised for their strength, let the wealthy not be praised for their wealth. Only for this is one to be praised: understand and know Me because I am the Lord who does loving kindness, moral justice and compassionate righteousness on earth. It is these things that I wish". (Jer. 9:23-24)

How do we match up to these ideals? Let me tell you a true incident which for me is a metaphor of our times. A young man attended a yeshiva in Tzfat. The first morning he arrived a bit late for breakfast and there was no milk left for his coffee. He went to the grocery, purchased a container of milk and placed the container in the Yeshiva refrigerator with a sign "private property". The next morning, the container was gone. He bought another container, on which he added to the previous sign "do not steal". The next morning, that container too was missing. He purchased a new container, adding to the sign "questionable gentle milk" (halav akum). This time no one took his container; he left the Yeshiva.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rav Yochanan Zweig

All For One

Listen, Israel, Hashem is our Lord, Hashem is One (6:4).

Bal Haturim (ad loc) points out that in the cantillation of this famous possuk [cantillation marks provide a structure to sentences of the Torah similar to that provided by punctuation marks] there is a psik between the second occurrence of "Hashem is" and the word "One." A psik essentially marks a pause. In other words, when reading the Shema the verse is broken up and read thusly: "Hashem is our Lord, Hashem is – One."

Bal Haturim explains that the use of the psik is to teach us a very specific lesson. In general, the description of Hashem as our "Lord" refers to His attribute of absolute justice, while the title "Hashem" refers to his attribute of absolute mercy. Bal Haturim therefore concludes that the pause in this verse is intended to teach us that both the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy are a part of the unity of the Almighty – "One."

Bal Haturim's explanation of the purpose of the psik requires further clarification. Why would we need a specific lesson to teach us that both attributes of the Almighty are a part of the unity? After all, a person can be happy or sad, kind or harsh, and we innately understand that it all stems from one source. Why would we need a special verse in the Torah, particularly what is probably the most famous verse in the Torah, to teach us that both attributes of Hashem are part of the same unity?

In truth, Bal Haturim is alluding to one of the most fundamental principles of our philosophy, one that is rightly taught from this famous possuk. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his famous work on philosophy Derech Hashem, points out (1:1:5) that Hashem, unlike a person, has no compartmentalization. That is, a person's psyche can be divided into many components – will, memory, imagination, desire, etc. – but Hashem is indivisible. Even though there are many attributes that we perceive, they are in truth all part of his perfect oneness: there are no separate components.

This difference is very important to internalize. A person can have varying reasons for his actions; therefore different feelings can be attached to each action. Hashem has a single purpose for everything and, as stated above, does not compartmentalize. The purpose of creation, according to Derech Hashem (1:2:1), is for Hashem to bestow good. Thus, every single act is part of the "goodness" that Hashem is providing. In other words, everything that Hashem does is part of the unity of purpose. Therefore, both mercy and justice are aspects of the same goodness, and a person receives what Hashem feels is the ultimate good in a given situation. The source of every act by Hashem is this unity. This is what we learn from the Shema.

Understanding this principle is the key to understanding Jewish philosophy. There is often a feeling of tension in the observance of the mitzvos; are we doing it for ourselves or for Him? For example, why do we keep Shabbos or kosher? Is it that we merely obey Hashem or is it because Hashem has determined that this system will deliver to our lives

the highest level of "good"? Examining this carefully is the difference between pining every second for Shabbos to arrive and pining every moment for Shabbos to be over. Do we continuously regret the constrictions that keeping kosher places upon us or are we thankful that Hashem has given us a system that He has determined is the best for us to follow? Do we perceive mitzvos as onerous obligations or a remarkable roadmap for successful living?

The Shema teaches us that everything is part of the unity of purpose and therefore for our good. We follow the Torah and mitzvos because it is in our best interest to do so. Even though we perceive different components of His actions, as viewed through the prism of our psyche, everything is in fact merely a reflection of the One and His desire to bestow good.

Home is Where You Are

And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates (6:9).

This week's parsha details the mitzvah of placing the ubiquitous mezuzah on the doorways of our homes. In fact, the word mezuzah itself means doorway. This seems a strange name for the piece of parchment that we affix to the doorway. Generally, names of mitzvos refer to the actual item utilized for the mitzvah, not how it is used or where it is placed; this would be like calling teffilin "forearm." Why is the name of this mitzvah different; what is so significant about where it is placed that it becomes the very definition of the mitzvah?

When Bnei Yisroel were about to leave Egypt, on the 15th of Nissan, Hashem commanded them to place the blood of the Korban Pesach on the doorways of their homes. The reason given in the Torah is that on this night Hashem was going to visit all the Egyptian homes and kill all the first born. By placing the blood on the doorways it would be recognizable as a Jewish home and Hashem would "pass-over" that home and not harm the inhabitants. In truth, this is a little odd. After all, Hashem Himself came to redeem the Jews that night and to smite the Egyptians; why would He need the blood on the doorway to perceive the difference between the homes of the Jews and those of the Egyptians?

The answer, of course, is that the purpose of placing blood on the doorways was for our own sake. It was our declaration that we are Jews and not Egyptians. Physically putting the blood on the doorways of our homes was an articulation of our allegiance to Hashem. Chazal teach us that most of the Jews never left Egypt (see Rashi Shemos 13:17); they had seemingly fully integrated into Egyptian society. Placing the blood on the doorways was a way of showing who had chosen to be Jews and not Egyptians. Why was this sign also the doorways to their homes?

In American society "a person's home is their castle." That is, a person's home is considered their absolute space. This has many applicable ramifications in law. Basically all homeowners consider their home to be their kingdom, where their rule is absolute. Similar to having a family name on the door or a "Villa De ___" sign on the wall, when we put a mezuzah up at the entrance of our home we are declaring that this is God's space. By putting up a mezuzah we are proclaiming that even in our most private space we are still in His place. This is why the very essence of the mitzvah of mezuzah is its placement on the doorways of our homes – a declaration that our home is really His and that Hashem's rule is absolute, even in our personal space.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha, Moshe retells the events of Matan Torah, and repeats the Ten Commandments. There's a machlokes if this week's parsha talks about the second set of Luchos, to replace the first set that were broken because of the Eigel Hazav (Golden Calf), or if this is just Moshe paraphrasing them (Ramban to Shemos 20:8, and others). Either way, the act of breaking the Luchos had major repercussions for the Jewish people, as the Gemara (Eruvin 54a) says that had they not been broken, no nation would have been able to rule over Bnei Yisroel.

Interestingly, there were many differences between the two versions of the Luchos, and here are some of them:

1. Hashem wrote the first Luchos, while Moshe wrote the second ones (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

2. The first set of Luchos were miraculously readable from both sides, while the second set were only readable from the front (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

3. The first set of Luchos were made of sapphire, while the second ones were just plain rock (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni #392).

4. The first set of Luchos had the entire Torah written on it, but the second pair only had the Aseres Hadibros (Beis Halevi, Derush #18). Not only were there differences in their physical aspects, but there were also differences in the very wording of the Aseres Hadibros including:

1. "Tov" is only mentioned in the second set of Luchos (in the commandment to honor one's parents). The Gemara (Bava Kama 55) answers that the reason is that the first Luchos were destined to be broken, and Hashem did not want the "tov," the good destined for the Jewish people, to be "broken" with the Luchos.

2. The Pesikta Rabasi (beginning of parsha 23) addresses the fact that in the first Luchos it says, "Remember the Shabbos day," while in the second account it says, "Keep the Shabbos day." The Pesikta Rabasi explains that the word "keep" is used to teach the Jewish people that only through "keeping" the Shabbos would they succeed in "keeping" the second Luchos from being lost like the first Luchos.

Dedicated LIN Binyomin Tzvi ben Shlomo Chaim. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 24 July 2021 / 15 Av 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Vaetchanan

Richard Branson and the Ultimate Joy-Ride

"Safeguard the day of Shabbat to sanctify it..." (5:12)

Billionaire Sir Richard Branson has successfully reached the edge of space on board his Virgin Galactic rocket plane. The UK entrepreneur flew high above New Mexico in the US in the vehicle that his company has been developing for 17 years. The trip was, he said, the "experience of a lifetime." He returned safely to Earth just over an hour after leaving the ground. "I have dreamed of this moment since I was a kid, but, honestly, nothing can prepare you for the view of Earth from space," he said in a press conference following the flight. "The whole thing was just magical."

I think Branson's expensive joy-ride has a deeper motivation though.

Judaism understands that all the pleasures, all the experiences of this world, are given to us for one reason only: that we might feel, that we might sense to the smallest degree... the taste of life itself.

But what is this "taste of life"? And what is "life itself" if not those experiences that it contains?

Imagine that you are standing in front of a firing squad, staring down the long black tunnel of the barrel of a rifle. "Squad! Take aim! And..." Just at that second, a messenger comes running into the square. "Stop the execution! The prisoner is free to go!"

Imagine how you would feel at that moment!

When our life hangs in the balance, when we are saved from a life-threatening experience, that euphoria is the perception of life itself, of existing. That moment of being rescued from death brings us face to face with our own existence. It is the sense of life itself.

There is, however, another less drastic and infinitely more spiritually uplifting way to experience the taste of life.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a, Avodah Zarah 9a) teaches us that the world as we know it will last for six thousand years. In the seventh millennium, about 220 years from now, the world will undergo a fundamental change. At that time, all activity will cease. That world is known as Olam Haba, literally, "the World to Come." If we were to try to imagine that future world, it would be like one continuous Shabbat. Shabbat is really a hint of the future world, the faintest whisper of that reality. On Shabbat we are bidden to refrain from very specifically defined "creative" work, and, by doing this, we are able to make contact with something that is beyond this world.

The essence of the future world is that it is an existence devoid of activity. When all activity ceases, we will be able to perceive "being"

itself. In the world in which we live now, we cannot distinguish between life experiences and life itself. We understand reality as being identical with our experiences. This is not true. The activity of the world in which we live now masks the perception of life itself, but when all activity ceases — then we will experience the taste of life itself. And when we experience that, it will be the sweetest thing that can be. That is what is known as the World to Come — existence without activity.

Some 600 individuals have already paid deposits for tickets that will cost them up to \$250,000. These are all people who want to reach a height where they can see the sky turn black and marvel at the Earth's horizon as it curves away into the distance. Such a flight should also afford them about five minutes of weightlessness, during which they will be allowed to float around inside Unity's cabin.

Shabbat gives you 24 hours of "weightlessness" and can cost considerably less than a quarter of a million dollars.

chiefrabbi.org

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Va'etchanan: Climate Change and Moshe Rabbeinu

Moshe seems to have done something which was totally unnecessary. In Parshat Va'etchanan we are told (Devarim 4:41),
"Az yavdil moshe shalosh arim."

Just before he was to pass away, Moshe, who was on the eastern side of the river Jordan because he couldn't enter into the Holy Land, separated off three cities there.

Of course, two and a half tribes were to be dwelling there, and these three cities were separated to be 'arei miklat' — cities of refuge, in order that any person guilty of manslaughter could flee there for the sake of their protection.

Now Moshe knew that these cities would only become active once three additional cities were inaugurated for this purpose in the Holy Land itself, which would not happen until well after his death, so why did he do this? It seemed to be for no purpose whatsoever.

The Kli Yakar explains that the key to understanding this is the very first word 'az'. "Az yavdil moshe," — "Then Moshe separated."

He was inspired to do this because of something which had happened just before. So let's look at the previous verse. There Moshe reminds the people of how Hashem instructed them to keep the word of Hashem (Devarim 4:40),

"asher yitav lecha ulevanecha achereicha," — "in order that it should be good for you and for your children after you."

You see it was there that Hashem told him that we should do what is responsible in life not just for our own sake — it's also for the sake of our children and future generations who will come after us. That is what inspired Moshe to recognise that even though he personally, and those around him, were not going to benefit from the setting aside of the cities, it was his responsibility to start to do this for the sake of those who would be living thereafter.

We have here a powerful Torah message about our purpose in life. We're not just here for our own sakes and those around us. We are here to invest responsibly in the future of our earth. That is why, when placing man in this world, Hashem said to us, "l'ovda uleshomra," — 'l'ovda' — you must work in this world, you must be productive and creative, but at the same time, 'uleshomra' — you must guard and protect it.

This is so very relevant for us right now with regard to climate change. Until quite recently many people just weren't taking the whole issue of climate change seriously but now it is abundantly clear to us all that in just 50-100 years' time, the very lives of our grandchildren and great grandchildren could be endangered unless we act now for the sake of our environment.

Let us therefore take a leaf out of the book of Moshe to guarantee that what we do now will be the right thing not just for us but also for the generations to come.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Vaeschanan - Killer Torah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

It is said with a combination of passionate joy and admiring wonder. As the Torah is raised for all to see, the congregants point to it as they recite a verse from this week's parsha. "V'zos hatorah asher sam Moshe...."

This is the Torah that Moshe presented before the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:44). It would seem that this verse refers to the deep and beautiful laws that inspire the same awe as the sight of the Torah scroll unfurled in all its glory. It isn't. In fact, the words now used to announce the glory of the Torah in its entirety are placed directly after a part of the Torah we might rather have skipped. The words, "V'zos HaTorah – this is the Torah" are written following the laws of the cities of refuge. People convicted of negligent manslaughter or awaiting trial for that crime must stay in specially designated cities until the Kohein Gadol dies. The cities of refuge are strategically located and in this week's portion the Torah reviews both the entry qualifications and the terms of inhabitance. We Jews are not proud of killers, yet we obviously must deal with them. The question is, however, why are the words, "this is the Torah," which seem to personify the very essence of our code of life, placed within any proximity to laws that show our lowest point. Rashi, the classic medieval commentator, may be bothered by this juxtaposition. He comments that the words refer to an ensuing portion, which recounts the Sinai experience and the receiving of the Ten Commandments. Ramban explains that after Moshe's admonition of the people, he once again resumes discussing the laws with them. I would like to explain the location of the words with a homiletic approach.

In the early 1900s a Rabbi who lived in the tenements on the Manhattan's Lower East Side had to attend a City function at which a notoriously anti-Semitic Episcopalian Minister was also present.

The Minister turned to the Rabbi and with a sinister smile remarked, "What a coincidence! It was just last night that I dreamt I was in Jewish heaven."

"Jewish heaven?" inquired the Rabbi. "What is it like in Jewish heaven?"

"Oh!" replied the priest. "In Jewish heaven the streets were filled with Jews. Children, their faces dirty, shirts untucked, and clothes unpressed were playing in the dirt. Women were haggling with fish-vendors as Jewish beggars tried to interrupt, asking for handouts. The clotheslines stretched across the roads with the dripping wash mixing with the dust below to add more mud to the existing mess on the ground. And of course," he added with a sinister laugh, "rabbis were running back and forth with large Talmudic volumes tucked under their arms!"

The Rabbi pursed his lips and then replied, "that is truly amazing. You see I dreamt last night that I was in Episcopalian heaven."

"Really?" the Minister asked "And pray tell me what is it like in Episcopalian heaven?"

"It is magnificent. The streets shine as if they have recently been washed. The homes are exquisitely lined up in perfect symmetry, each with a small garden that has beautiful flowers and a perfectly manicured lawn. The homes were freshly painted and they sparkled in the sunlight!"

The Minister beamed. "And what about the people? Tell me about the people!"

The Rabbi smiled, looked the Minister right in the eye, and tersely stated, "There were no people."

By placing the words "this is the Torah that Moshe presented" directly after the laws of the cities of refuge, the Torah sends a message that it does not shirk or evade guiding us through every aspect of life. Whether the Torah is commanding the laws of priestly blessings or sharing the Passover story or rehabilitating a man who accidentally killed, it is an equal part of Torah and must be proudly proclaimed as such. We don't ignore our misfortunes nor hide them as if they do not exist. The laws of thieves and murderers are as part of the Torah as the perpetrators are part of society. We don't hide the unfortunate and wrongdoers from our existence. They exist in society and in the Torah that deals with their needs and laws. And when it deals with them the Torah proudly

proclaims that this, too, is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel.

Dedicated in memory of David Atlas by his son Larry Atlas

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Copyright © 1997 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

Drasha © 2020 by Torah.org.

torahweb.org

Longing for the Coveted Land - Past and Present

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Twenty years ago, I had the merit of writing a devar Torah on parshas Va'Eschanan portraying the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in facilitating complete fulfillment of the Torah, Hashem's masterplan for His beloved people.[1] This is highlighted beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu's fervent prayer for entry into the Holy Land at the very beginning of our parsha continuing throughout the parsha with its repeating refrain - anticipating the imminent entry of the Jewish people into the Land - of the performance of all the mitzvos, even those not dependent on the land, specifically in Eretz Yisrael. This clearly indicates that this land is the main epicenter of the performance of all of them. Since there are many additional ideas I believe worthy of developing, and, in my humble opinion, many international events have occurred recently highlighting the timeliness of these themes, I, with considerable trepidation, write the following thoughts in the hope of inspiring greater love for the Holy Land and fostering additional interest of more families in building their homes in Eretz Yisrael.

The Holy Land is endowed with a dual sanctity: a Divinely-bestowed one, and a humanly created one. The first is reflected in the Land being called "the land of Hashem"(Hoshei'a 9:3) Hashem Himself being referred to as the "G-d of the land" (Melachim II 17:26), in the increased Divine providence present in the Land, and in the Land being the focal point of the direction of prayers and the location from which prayers throughout the world soar heavenward (Berachos 30a). These themes and many other unique aspects to the Land have been presented majestically by many, among them the Ramban, in his commentary on Chumash.[2] The second, a more technical one, is affected by conquest or possession of the Land (see Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechira 6:16). This generates the Torah obligations of most mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz - agricultural commandments.[3] [4] This duality, reflecting an oft-occurring theme in Jewish life - a fixed Divine component and a human variable component, seems to indicate the Divine Will of maintaining an active partnership with mankind in bringing about a more perfect reality.[5]

The motivations for aliyah to Eretz Yisrael can be divided into several categories: 1) the pragmatic, 2) the mitzvah based, 3) the idealistic, and 4) the messianic. On the pragmatic level, many have immigrated to Eretz Yisrael as refugees - among them refugees from the periods before, during and after the Holocaust, those banished from multiple Arab lands after the foundation of the State of Israel, and many fleeing persecution or economic hardship in the former Soviet Union. The Land of Israel served as a place of refuge for all of them.[6] To be sure, many among this group - even if historical events had not forced them to flee - were still filled with love of the Land and viewed their immigration there as a great fulfillment of Torah concepts and even Biblical prophecies, but, nonetheless, the main motivation was escape. Some even find better employment opportunities for their particular field of work or cheaper housing and education as well in Israel. These motivations are primarily practical, not spiritual.

On the other hand, many have made aliyah convinced that living in the Land is a mitzvah, whether obligatory as indicated by the simple reading of Ramban and others or optional but still constituting the fulfillment of a Divine commandment (mitzvah kiyumis) as might be the view of the Rambam and was the view of Igros Moshe and Rav Y.D. Soloveitchik zt"l. Some maintain that even if living in the Land does not fulfill a specific Divine command but comprises the Will of Hashem.[7] This latter viewpoint was expressed poignantly by Rav Sholom Gold shlit"a:[8]

The story is told of a Diaspora Jew who studied in depth the whole range of opinions about yishuv haAretz and then called and made an appointment with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. The appointed day came; he arrived at the airport, took a cab to Shaare Chesed, made his way up the steps and soon found himself in the Rosh Yeshiva's presence. He proceeded to begin to pour out all the knowledge he had committed to memory, when R. Auerbach said softly in Yiddish, "Es iz nisht vichtig" - "It is not important." Our Diaspora hero was devastated - but nevertheless pressed on until he heard again, "It's not important." In his desperation he asked, "What does the Rosh Yeshiva mean, it's not important?" To which R. Shlomo Zalman replied, "Just open up a Chumash and read and you will see that ratzon Hashem (G-d's will) is that Jews should live in Eretz Yisroel."

Many have been inspired or could be inspired based on idealism to build up the land agriculturally, economically, and spiritually. As one example, Rav Moshe Ze'ev Katz zt"l, a prominent, energetic Rabbinic personality, came to Beit Shemesh in the 1970s when it was a spiritual wasteland. Singlehandedly, he built up a network of Torah centers and inspired hundreds to return to Torah observance. It might be fair to say that the foundation of the entire Ramat Beit Shemesh (now, Baruch Hashem, comprising Aleph, Bet, Gimmel and Dalet and more!), with its thousands of families and growing each year, all rode on the coattails of this initial investment of mesirus nefesh, if not through direct cause and effect but at least on a spiritual level. Furthermore, on a klal Yisrael level, every religious family's aliyah increases the spiritual nature of the entire yishuv. In the powerful words of one of the great Torah giants of the last century, Rav Yechiel Michel Tiktchinsky zt"l, calling to us now (and perhaps even more so!) as when they were written over half a century ago:

What of today? How easy travel is to Eretz Yisrael! From America to [Israel] is only 36 hours (!)... All the roads are paved, water and other food staples are not lacking, electricity [and] fuel. Those who control the land is the government of Israel; the gates of the land are open wide. There is no remnant of the [certificate system]...

What is lacking today? That strong yearning which burned in the hearts of the faithful of Israel of previous generations in chutz la'aretz. Had travel and entry to Eretz Yisrael been so easy one hundred years ago or if all of the faithful of Israel in our era been drawn by the same soul-strings to our Holy City and Land, Eretz Yisrael would have been settled by a solid majority of shomrei Torah u'mitzvos. On the seats of the Knesset would be sitting authentic Jews who know and feel what Eretz Yisrael means and the intensity of the bonds which connect [the Land] and [the people]. Eretz Yisrael would then have an entirely different character. The Knesset laws would be based on the Torah of Israel; there would be no question in Israel about keeping Shabbos... and certainly there would be no freedom for missionaries to proselytize Jews. No perikas 'ol, no desecration of Jewish values, no war of the mundane over the sanctified, no youth educated wantonly, degrading human life.

All this would occur if the faithful of Israel in chutz la'aretz were drawn to the land. They could save the Jewish religion and the sanctity of the Land from its desecrators and its enemies. True, even today, most of them feel a great connection to our holy Land; they pray toward it... raise its mention above all of their joy. Even today, they support the Jewish yishuv no less than in the past, but they still embrace dwelling in Exile. Many view their domicile there in the future [as well].

It is incumbent upon all shomrei Torah u'mitzva, especially all of our Rabbinim, to learn a lesson from the previous aliyot who entered Eretz Yisrael with great self-sacrifice and desired to take refuge in the chatzros Hashem and to release the land from its defilers. ברכות ד' דרכי איש גם אוייבי ישלימו אתו, and Israel will dwell securely from its external enemies, and the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael would shine in splendor as in days of old. We would then draw near, day by day, to our complete redemption and our hoped-for destiny. (Sefer Eretz Yisrael, end of Chapter 27)

Additionally, many have been inspired by messianic yearnings. In past centuries, it is a well-documented fact of history that many aliyot of hundreds of families were inspired by messianic hope.[9] Some were

anticipatory: based on passages in the Zohar, messianic speculation was rife in the years 1740 and 1840. Some were proactive. Many students of the Gaon of Vilna and many Chassidim made aliyah at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries to jumpstart the process of the spiritual awakening of the Land hopefully to be met with Divine favor; the Master of History would then hopefully take the redemptive process to the next step. Rav Tzvi Hirsh Kalischer zt"l (see his *Derishas Tzion*) even thought that, in addition to the founding of agricultural settlements, we must bring korbanos even before the Mikdash is built (following the pattern of the Shivas Tzion in the days of Zerubavel and later Ezra) in order to awaken Divine mercy to hasten the redemption. Many have seen or currently see within either the Balfour declaration, the San Remo conference, the 1947 United Nations vote, or, more recently, the explosion of the Jewish yishuv to over six million (kein yirbu!) a fulfillment of at least a pekida, the first step of the redemptive process to be followed by the zechira, the last step.[10] The pekida step of redemption during the Shivas Tzion leading up to the second Mikdash began with the call of Coresh, king of Persia, "Who among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and he may ascend!" (*Divrei Hayamim II* 36:23). Many believe our era is directly parallel to that one. Recently, inspired and perhaps frightened by the global pandemic of COVID-19 and now the more recent Delta variant, as well as the on-again, off-again closing of most air travel to Eretz Yisrael, rising anti-Semitism, and additional security concerns, some have been talking of mashiach's imminent arrival even pronouncing, "We better go now before the gates close totally!" Understandably, many Rabbinic personalities past and present have forcefully objected to some or all of these movements. One claim advanced is that such speculation, especially if advanced by Rabbinic scholars, if not met by fulfillment of the messianic expectation would be followed by lessening the stature of Rabbinic viewpoints in the eyes of the Jewish people. An additional concern is that the disillusionment of the final redemption not coming when expected would lead to spiritual malaise or even worse, as unfortunately has happened often in our tragic history in the aftermath of false or misguided messianic movements.

In my humble opinion, although the second motivation for aliyah based on ratzon Hashem seems to be the most basic, pure motive as well as the third motive of idealism both of which indeed have led to many thousands of current residents of the Promised Land uprooting from their former domiciles,[11] all the motivations have their proper place as well. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn to the various inspirations to teshuva. Rabbeinu Yona in his crucial work *Sha'arei Teshuva* (*Sha'ar 2*) outlines several motivations to repent, among them ideal and non-ideal ones. But as Chazal (*Pesachim* 50b) tell us and even recommend[12] לעולם יעסוק אדם ב תורה ובמצוות אף על פי שלא לשותה, בא לשותה" - "a person should constantly engage in Torah [study] and [the performance of] the commandments even for ulterior motives, for from these ulterior motives will sprout pure ones." If even an ulterior motive inspires the person to act properly then it can be viewed positively. But one has to be certain that the person does not make the desirable activity dependent solely on the motivation. The motivation is exactly that - a motivation, not the essence of what is being done. I believe that the same can apply to messianic motivations. If the person is motivated to make aliyah based on his belief that mashiach's arrival is imminent, which can be premised not just on an emergency sense of leaving the Exile before it is too late but on heeding the Divine call of history, he must temper this vision with the fact that he does not dictate to G-d how He chooses to run Jewish and world history! Messianic expectation need not be an all or nothing proposal; it can provide inspiration and cause a pause from life's routine to explore fundamental values including yishuv ha'aretz, but cannot and should not be the overarching principle with the concomitant danger of leading to a "spiritual crash" if one's expectations are not fulfilled.

Although necessary caution in too much messianic speculation is certainly in order, I believe this does not exempt us from attempting, with proper humility and uncertainty, from trying to "read the map" of individual and national events in our lives. Elsewhere[13] I referenced

Rav Schwab's enlightening insight on the phrase in the last blessing of the morning Shema, "ashrei ha'am sheyishma l'mitzvosecha v'toras'cha ud'var'cha yasim 'al libo" - "praiseworthy is the nation who hearkens unto your commandments and places your Torah and your Word on its heart". "Your Torah" and "Your Word" seem to be redundantly synonymous. Rav Schwab explains that "Your Word" refers to the messages Hashem sends to us indirectly through intervention in our lives. In this vein, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l, at the beginning of the 20th century, concerning the Balfour Declaration exclaimed:

"Where are the Torah Jews from the lands of exile? Don't they see G-d's finger in all of this? Now I understand what it says in the musaf prayer for Yom Tov. 'And because of our sins we were exiled from our country and were distanced from our Land.' 'We were exiled from our country' by G-d, and then 'we were distanced from our Land' by ourselves! Have we ceased our anticipation? Imagine it hadn't rained for 2,000 years, and then suddenly one day a tiny cloud appeared. Wouldn't everyone become excited, and say, trembling, 'Perhaps this is it? Maybe, after all...?' Isn't the (British) Mandate at least comparable to this little cloud?"

We can only guess what Rav Sonnenfeld would have proclaimed in an era where over six million Jews live in Eretz Yisrael, the economy is flourishing and yeshivos and kollelim, attended by thousands of students, abound.

Mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit'a has often described the dual mitzvos of yishuv ha'aretz, building up of the land, and yeshivas ha'aretz, actually dwelling in the land. One who financially supports the yishuv from chutz la'aretz fulfills the former but not the latter. One who lives in Eretz Yisrael but is supported from chutz la'aretz fulfills the latter but possibly not the former. The outlook some convey that living in Eretz Yisrael is the only important mitzvah in the Torah and especially the attitude of those not leading proper Torah lifestyles living in Israel who point an accusing finger at those who are more dedicated to Torah values than they are or even at those who are spiritually guiding hundreds if not thousands of Jews who live in chutz la'aretz - because the latter live in chutz la'aretz and the former live in Eretz Yisrael - are grossly misguided. But the dual truisms that leading meaningful Torah-filled lives in chutz la'aretz is also fundamental avodas Hashem and that supporting the yishuv also partakes of one part of the mitzvah should not, to my mind, serve as a sufficient reason to ignore the possibility of actual yeshivas ha'aretz. An analogy may be drawn to the relationship between supporters of Torah and learners of Torah. This partnership is a crucial one with the former sometimes even being awarded primacy due to the fact that without them the Torah would not be studied; but no one would claim that being a toomech Torah exempts one who can from learning Torah! Certainly, as Rav Y. D. Solovetchik zt"l, mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlit'a and mori v'Rabi Rav Mordechai Willig shlit'a (and earlier Maharam Schick) have often stated and advised, irreplaceable Rabbinic leadership and Torah teachers must fill the important role of serving klal Yisrael in chutz la'aretz, but this, to my humble mind, does not exempt those not filling this crucial role from seriously considering aliyah.

How does one who does not feel sufficient motivation to practically consider this central aspect of avodas Hashem become inspired? Telling is an insight of the Abarbanel (Rosh Amana) in his defense of the Rambam's view that there is a normative mitzvah to believe in Hashem - counted among the 613 mitzvos - against the critique of some thinkers that one cannot command belief.[14] He answers that belief is not a direct commandment, but rather an indirect one. The commandment is to act in a way that fosters that belief, primarily through study. He gives an analogy of falling in love. (Even the English phrase is very telling.) One cannot command or instantly feel love, but one can act in ways which will foster that strong emotional bond. In the beautiful phraseology of the Abarbanel, "It comes in an instant, seeming inexplicably, fostered by the person's initial activities." The same is true concerning inspiration toward aliyah - one has to foster an emotional and intellectual bond through study and experience. The footnote makes some recommendations of inspiring works.[15]

Many articles have been written and crucial, informative Rabbinic input has been presented about various difficulties new olim can encounter especially concerning education of children. These issues cannot be ignored in one's pursuit of this noble dream. But I firmly believe that the correct path is to seek out solutions to these issues, not just to dismiss aliyah as an option because of them. Indeed, much has been done in the past 20 years in Israel to address these issues. Job networks abound, many new schools have been created catering largely, if not exclusively, to the Anglo, Torah-observant crowd presenting all kinds of different combinations of Torah and general subjects and varied across the hashkafic spectrum. Additionally, professional support groups especially for tweens and teens have been formed and provide crucial assistance and safety nets. Living in Israel, although certainly having its unique challenges - as it simultaneously presents even greater, unique opportunities - has gotten more and more feasible for families of all types in just the past decade. Telecommuting, once the province of the few, has become much more of a norm in the "COVID-19 era" enabling additional employment opportunities once not feasible. A world-renowned Yeshiva has even founded a group to study the feasibility of the aliyah of tens, perhaps hundreds, of families to establish their own community. Families who have explored options some time ago should re-explore based on the current situation which keeps changing for the better. Whereas due research is certainly in order, too much hesitancy in this area to make sure every single detail is in place might be counterproductive. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l often would quote the popular saying that "before entering Eretz Yisrael one has to kill the king of Cheshbon (calculation)!" [A playful reference to Sichon, the king of Cheshbon.] (See Halichos Shlomo, Tefilah 23:fn 16.) Every day, three times a day, we pray to Hashem: "Blow the great shofar for our freedom; lift up the banner to gather our exiles!" Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to say that this banner has been lifted up by the Great Actor of History higher and higher especially with recent events.

The Rambam, in disagreement with others, states that the mashiach will prove his messianic mission not with miracles but by doing what the Messiah is supposed to do - bringing the Jewish people back to Torah, gathering the Exiles, fighting against the enemies of Israel and defeating them and building the Mikdash. Perhaps the best way we as a people can partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the great messianic drama - a drama to whose exact scenes and denouement we are not privy - but one whose initial steps certainly include kibbutz galuyos (see Megilla 17b) is by actively participating in this stage.[16] Even if the final redemption is chas v'shalom still far away, one who chooses to uproot and replant his family back in the primary place of the Jewish people, will be a beneficiary of the great spiritual value - and mitzvah according to many Rishonim - of living in the Land which is present even during the darkest period of exile.

How fortunate we are to live in an era where living in Eretz Yisrael is orders of magnitude easier than it had been for so many centuries! How fortunate we are to live in an era to be able to choose a career in Eretz Yisrael and an appropriate school for our children instead of dealing with practically no employment or schooling opportunities! How fortunate we are to live to see the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael blossom at such a rapid pace so that in a short period of time, even in the natural course of events, a majority of the Jewish people will be living in the Holy Land!

If we beseech HaKadosh Baruch Hu מז'ל ציון כי עת להננה כי בא מועד - "May you arise, have mercy on Zion for the time has come to favor it, for the designated time as arrived", it certainly behooves us to seriously consider dwelling in the Eretz Hashem.

I heard an informative vignette from my father z"l concerning a Chassidic Rebbe who wished to embark on a massive spiritual project to benefit the Jewish people. His detractors chided him, "Rebbe, du bist a chalomer!" ("Rebbe, you are a dreamer!"), to which he responded, "Ken zein az ich bin a chalomer, ubber ich shluft nisht!" ("It could be that I'm a dreamer, but I am not sleeping!") If we view aliyah as a desirable goal or even if we do not yet but we are convinced that it should be a goal of

ours, we must keep the dream alive by constantly learning, experiencing and inquiring so that the dream can become a reality for thousands, and hopefully even hundreds of thousands, of more Jews, faithful to Torah values, who have the ability to elevate themselves along with their families, greatly affect the yishuv in the Holy Land, and b'ezras Hashem bring the day of our final redemption closer!

[1] *Mitzvot and Eretz Yisrael*

[2] Also see *Yadav Emunah* by Rav C. D. Sapirstein (*Sha'ar 7*) where these themes are presented in an organized, thought-provoking manner. See there also for an important treatment of the deeper meaning of the seemingly incomprehensible statement of Chazal, as popularized by Ramban, that mitzvos in *Eretz Yisrael* are fundamentally significant, whereas in *chutz la'aretz* they are performed in order that we "keep in practice" for when we return. Can it be that the mitzvos performed by *khal Yisrael* in exile together with its exalted leaders for almost 2000 years are just "practice"?! Whereas some might be satisfied with the simple reading of this statement of Chazal, one would be hard pressed to envision the water-carrier in *Eretz Yisrael* receiving a higher reward in *Gan Eden* than the *Ba'al Shem Tov* or the *GR"Al*? Rav Sapirstein formulates the difficulty and presents a very cogent, profound answer to this conundrum.

[3] See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, *Eretz Yisrael*: 2: *Kedushasa UMitzvosha* for a thorough treatment of these two sanctities.

[4] It would appear that the debate between *Tosfos* and *Ramban* (beginning of *Gittin*) whether one fulfills the mitzvah of living in *Eretz Yisrael* in land conquered by the *olei Mitzrayim* but not resettled by the *olei Bavel* revolves around the following point: Is the mitzvah of living in the Land based on the goal of living under direct Divine providence (dependent on the first, Divinely-bestowed sanctity) or is it based on enabling oneself to fulfill all of the mitzvos *hateluyos ba'aretz* (dependent on the second, humanly-endowed sanctity)? See also *Aynei Nezer* (Y. D. 454:14 ff.).

[5] See *Meshech Chachma* (on beginning of *Behar*, s.v. "ב"נ"ז") who compares *Shabbos* vs. *Yom Tov* and *shemita* vs. *yovel*. Also see *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Tazria* 5) which records the famous conversation between *R. Akiva* and the Roman general, *Turmsrifus*, concerning *mila*.

[6] Also see *Fleeing From: Running To*.

[7] See a thorough treatment of the various views in the *RJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, Vol. 5, "The Mitzva of *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael*", by mori v'Rabi, Rav H. Schachter shlit'a and *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Vols. I-II, by mori v'Rabi Rav J. D. Bleich shlit'a and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, *Yeshivas Eretz Yisrael*.

[8] Available here

[9] See *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel* by Dr. Arie Morgenstern.

[10] See the eye-opening work, *Acharis K'Reishis* by Rav Aryeh Shapira shlit'a based on the teachings of *Ramchal* and *GR"Al* that all redemptions have occurred and will occur with these two steps.

[11] When I recently asked a prominent doctor in Ramat Beit Shemesh what motivated him to make aliyah 20 years ago, he responded, somewhat surprised at my question, "Have you seen *Tanach* or the *Kuzari*?"

[12] Heard from Rav Noah Isaac Oelbaum shlit'a based on the language of "Volam".

[13] Divine Communication: Two Different Types

[14] Even those *Rishonim* (see *Or Hashem*) who maintain that belief is not formally a mitzvah certainly agree that it is obligatory since it is a reasonable Divine expectation. They claim that for technical reasons it cannot be counted in the list of mitzvos since mitzvos are only relevant to those activities that are subject to free will.

[15] To Dwell in the Palace: Perspectives on *Eretz Yisrael* by *Tzvia Ehrlich-Klein*, *A Drop in the Ocean - A Daily Dose of Eretz Yisrael* by Rabbi Moshe Lichtenman and Michael Freund, *Yadav Emunah* (Hebrew) (*Sha'ar 7*) by Rabbi C. D. Sapirstein, and *Sefer Eretz Yisrael* (Hebrew) by Rav Y. M. Tikatchinsky (chapters 25 & 27). The following websites also contain many inspiring and informative articles: www.nachtel.org and see there under "Resources" for additional websites and <http://www.qdushat-zion.022.co.il/>, a gateway to a relatively new Israeli organization and publication promoting aliyah and a Torah society in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Kedushas Zion*.

[16] As mori v'Rabi Rav Dovid Miller shlit'a often states, "One living in Israel is living in the front seat of Jewish history, not the bleachers!"

Copyright © 2021 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Written in stone (Vaetchanan)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Constitutions should consist only of general provisions; the reason is that they must necessarily be permanent, and that they cannot calculate for the possible change of things. - Alexander Hamilton

In the Torah reading of Vaetchanan, Moses recalls the revelation of God to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. He takes the opportunity to repeat the Ten Commandments (with some minor differences to the one stated in the Book of Exodus).

In retelling the story, Moses highlights that the Ten Commandments were written on two tablets of stones. The Bechor Shor on Deuteronomy 4:13 wonders as to the significance of repeating this detail.

He explains that there is particular importance to the Ten Commandments and that's why it was etched in stone, as opposed to on papyrus or parchment. The Ten Commandments needed to be written on a material that would never decompose. These verses needed to be written permanently, so that we would never forget them.

The Ten Commandments constitute the foundation of our faith:

The belief in God; not worshipping any other gods; not taking His name in vain; keeping the Sabbath; honoring our parents; no murder; no adultery; no stealing; no false witness; no coveting.

These are the building blocks of Jewish faith.

Remembering these principles is so foundational that based on this the Sages learn that whoever actively forgets them or any related teaching is worthy of the death punishment. "Actively forgets" is different than merely forgetting or even not having learned it in the first place; it

means someone who by deliberate thought decides to disassociate these commandments from his consciousness.

That's why they're written in stone. The commandments are immutable. They are eternal. They are a permanent guiding force for the Jewish people for millennia. If we don't currently have the carved tablets within reach, we should at least etch these commandments in our hearts.

May we merit to rediscover the Tablets of the Law in their housing in the Ark of the Covenant, together with the rebuilt Temple, speedily, in our days.

Dedication - To Ben & Jerry's Israel.

Shabbat Shalom Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Faith in One G-d – Faith in Goodness

Bs"d Va'etchanan 5781

The speeches convey the glory and beauty in the path G-d bequeathed to His nation, and the love and affection in this connection between the Jewish people and G-d. This week's Torah portion, *Va'etchanan*, continues the series of speeches from the previous parasha, *Devarim*, and focuses on faith in one G-d and the prohibition of creating anything in His image.

The significance of G-d's revelation at Mount Sinai, an event described in this parasha, far surpasses the creation of a new religion or the cohesiveness of a new nation around its G-d. The idea that appeared in the world was far-reaching; an idea that had been forgotten since G-d created His world. As people became further distanced from the concept around which the world was created, they created spiritual and historical significance through idol worship, believing that there were different gods in the world, each with its own power. The gods created humans and therefore they must be worshipped. They are the source of power and they determine fate. Idolatry typically did not view the gods as particularly good. With a few exceptions, the gods were not seen as having a specific stance on how reality should appear. On the contrary, the gods were often haphazard in their decisions. Despite this, having a close connection with them, through sacrifices and statues, brought them satisfaction and could lead to beneficial reciprocal treatment.

When G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, a fundamentally different theological concept revealed itself as well:

"I am the Lord your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall not have the gods of others in My presence. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness which is in the heavens above, which is on the earth below, or which is in the water beneath the earth. You shall not prostrate yourself before them, nor worship them..." (Deuteronomy 5, 6-9)

And Moses warns again:

"And you shall watch yourselves very well, for you did not see any image on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. Lest you become corrupt and make for yourselves a graven image, the representation of any form..." (Deuteronomy 4, 15-16)

There is only one G-d, and He does not want us to create images or likenesses of Him. So, the question is, what does He want? What is the significance of worshipping one G-d? If He does not want us to worship His image, what does He want from us?

We read this in the parasha repeatedly. The significance of worshipping G-d is embodied in the laws of justice given in the Torah. G-d's will is for us to worship Him through keeping these laws and regulations. These laws strive to bring the world and man toward absolute, divine justice, and make life better and more honest.

This idea, that appeared in G-d's revelation on Mount Sinai, carries within it tremendous meaning: G-d does not require anything of us on His own behalf, just for our own, since these laws do not cause Him any satisfaction or fulfill any of His needs. They were written for one purpose only:

"And the Lord commanded us to perform all these statutes, to fear the Lord, our G-d, for our good all the days, to keep us alive, as of this day. And it will be for our merit that we keep to observe all these

commandments before the Lord, our G-d, as He has commanded us." (Deuteronomy 6, 24-25)

Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (Biblical commentator, Italy, 19th century) explained these verses charmingly:

The commandments are for our own good because through them social issues will be repaired peacefully and honestly, and besides this, we will have charity and merit if we keep them, and G-d will give us rewards for this.

In conclusion, the significance of faith in one G-d is that G-d is beneficent, that the world was created out of goodness, and that the relationship between man and G-d goes through His laws of justice whose purpose is to fill the world with goodness.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Va'etchanan: In Mind and Heart

Chanan Morrison

The Aleinu prayer, recited at the conclusion of every prayer service, contains the following verse:

יִדְעַת לְבָבֶךָ וְשָׁבַת אֶל-לְבָבֶךָ

"Know it today and ponder it in your heart: God is the Supreme Being in heaven above and on the earth below — there is no other." (Deut. 4:39) What is the difference between "knowing it" and "pondering it in our heart"?

Two Stages of Acceptance

Sometimes, people admit that there is a gap between what they know intellectually and what they are ready for emotionally. They will say, "Yes, this makes sense. This is a better way, a healthier way, a truer way. Still, it's not for me. It's too hard; I cannot do it."

Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the importance of two steps. First, we need to recognize the truth. This is the initial cognitive stage of **הִזְעָדָה**, "know it today."

This stage is critical, but it is still only on a theoretical level. It must be followed by the second step: to internalize that which the mind comprehends. We need to accept emotionally the ramifications of this understanding and be willing to act upon it. That is the second stage, **הַשְׁבָּת אֶל-לְבָבֶךָ**, "ponder it in your heart."

The second stage of practical acceptance should be rooted in the initial step of intellectual comprehension. As the Sages taught (Berachot 13a), "First accept the kingdom of Heaven, and then the yoke of practical mitzvot."

Above and Below

The verse continues by stating that God is supreme in both "the heaven above and on the earth below." What does this mean?

This does not refer to God's unity in the universe, but to our own inner unity when we accept His reign. "Heaven" and "earth" are metaphors for our two major faculties: the mind and the heart. We need to be consistent so that how we act is not detached from what we believe.

In summary, we should accept God's kingship on both levels:

To understand intellectually — in the "heaven above" — using our minds, in cognitive thought and belief.

And to act upon that wisdom on a practical level — "on the earth below" — with our hearts and our will, by implementing our intellectual understanding in the realm of deed and action.

(*Gold from the Land of Israel*. pp. 299-300. Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 324-325)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Va'eschanan

פרק ואחתן תשפ"א

אותהן אל ד' בנת הארץ

I implored Hashem at that time. (3:23)

In the *Zera Kodesh*, the *Ropshitzer Rebbe*, zl, observes that the *pasuk* neglects to identify "that time." Was Moshe *Rabbeinu* referring to a specific time? The *Ropshitzer* explains that this omission is by design. The Torah is teaching us a critical lesson with regard to *tefillah*, prayer. No specific time is established for petitioning Hashem. We can approach the Almighty at any time. No "appointments" are necessary. A son need not have a special time to speak

with his father. (If he does, both father and son have a problem.) Hashem is our Heavenly Father, Who waits for our entreaty with a warm welcome. Even if the response is not what we are hoping for, our supplication will be heard, our emotions felt and saved. No prayer is lost; no tear is wasted.

The *Rebbe* says that a person should never say to himself, "Right now, at this moment, I do not have the lucidity to pray. I need to be in a proper presence of mind to be able to articulate my needs correctly. Later on, when I am free of some of the burdensome pressures that are overwhelming me, I will be able to *daven* like a *mentch*. This is an incorrect way of thinking. One should *daven* whenever the need arises, regardless of his frame of mind. No wrong time exists to speak to a father.

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, would *daven* to Hashem in the most natural manner, as if this were the only way he could ever accomplish or obtain anything. When he would return from praying at the *Kosel Maaravi*, he would remark in *Yiddish*, "I asked Him for this or that." Everyone knew that "Him" was a reference to Hashem. This was his usual vernacular — He spoke with "Him." His relationship with Hashem was very real, like a son to his father.

Rav Abramsky's Shabbos table was set with its fine linen, dishes and flatware as early as Friday morning. A student who was visiting that morning inquired why the family was preparing for *Shabbos* so early in the day. He explained that, years earlier, upon immigrating to *Eretz Yisrael*, his wife's grandfather, the venerable *Radbaz*, zl, moved to *Tzfas* where he maintained a *yeshivah*. He became gravely ill and the medical establishment had already despaired his returning to good health. He suddenly spoke the following: "Hashem, what is it You want of me? I study Torah all day. I authored a commentary on the *Yerushalmi* (which no one else had really achieved). If You want me to write a commentary to *Bavli*, You already have so many other commentaries that cover the gamut of *Bavli*." As soon as he concluded his short "request" of Hashem, he closed his eyes and appeared to be drifting off into a deep sleep. A few minutes passed, and he opened his eyes and spoke. He turned to his *rebbetzin* and made a request, "Please, I ask that every Friday morning when I return home from *Shacharis* that the *Shabbos* table should already be set. I was told by 'Heaven' that my cure is dependent upon this." *Rav Abramsky* said, "In deference to the *Zaide's* custom, we, too, set our table early." (The purpose of redacting this story is to show how the *Radbaz* prayed to Hashem. It was his conversation with the Almighty.)

Rav Abramsky would walk over to the *Kosel* and place his face close to it and speak to the stones. His close students wanted to know what their saintly *Rebbe* said to the stones. As the *Rav* was lost in his conversation with the stones, they carefully moved closer in order to listen. This is what they heard: "Ribono shel olam," he wept, "You are the greatest *Rebbe* of all. How do I know this? It is written, *Hamelameid Torah l'Amo Yisrael*. 'How will *Moshiach* know Torah?' Where will he study it? Not in *Brisk*, *Ger*, *Porat Yosef* or *Ponovez*. Where then? Apparently, You, Hashem will teach him. So I ask, 'If you can teach Torah to *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, what would be if you would learn Torah with me?'" This is how *Rav Abramsky* prayed to Hashem! He conversed with the Almighty like a son to his father.

Raising good, G-d-fearing, Torah-abiding children does not just happen. It requires much vigilance, hard work, and, most of all, prayer, or, as the *Brisker Rav* was wont to say: *Tehillim mit treren*, "Tehillim accompanied by copious weeping." He observed that his father, *Horav Chaim*, zl, cried for him even after he was a *Rosh Yeshivah*! Indeed, *Rav Chaim's* father, the *Bais HaLevi*, zl, *davened* for his son even after he was *Rav* in *Brisk*.

Likewise, someone once asked the saintly *Chasam Sofer* how he merited to have such a holy son as the *Ksav Sofer*. The *Chasam Sofer* removed his hat, turned it over and said, "I filled this hat with tears to merit having such a precious son."

We all want good children — on our terms. We check off all the boxes on the parenting guides to make certain that we do everything correctly. What about *tefillah*, prayer? Perhaps, because it is not included in all the parenting guidebooks, it is not necessary. We maintain otherwise. It is our first and only line of defense. Without Hashem's participation and blessing, the guidebooks are meaningless. If we do not petition His blessing, then we are failing our children as parents.

Rabbeinu Bachya (*Shemos* 19:3) writes: "It is befitting for a woman to *daven* to Hashem following the lighting of candles, for this is a *mitzvah* that helps her very much. This is the time in which she should *daven* that Hashem grant her children who are enlightened with Torah." Parents once came to one of the *gedolim* and cried concerning their son's spiritual status, which had dwindled terribly. Sadly, he had deviated from the Torah way. What could they do? The *gadol* replied that the mother should light and accept *Shabbos* upon herself thirty minutes prior to candle-lighting time. This should be followed by intense prayer from the depth of her heart, with tears and pleading to Hashem. Their child would return. He did. *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro*, zl, said that whenever he had a difficulty or a problem with a child, the first thing he did was speak to Hashem and ask for His help and guidance. He asked that Hashem give him sound counsel

on how to speak with his child effectively in addressing the different situations that they faced.

As I wrote in the beginning: Nothing just happens. We must ask – nay, beg – for it. Only then can we hope to merit Hashem's blessing.

וזאת התורה אשר שם מורה לבני ישראל

This is the Torah/teaching that Moshe placed before *Bnei Yisrael*. (4:44)

V'nasan lanu es Toraso, "And Hashem gave us His Torah" is the motif that should accompany each Torah learning session. When we study Torah, we are hearing the words of Hashem and carrying out His will. He gave us His Torah, so that we should learn it, learn from it, observe its precepts and lessons. It is from the Torah that we, as Jews, receive and accept our guidance concerning our *derekh ha'chaim*, way of life.

The Jew that lives his life with the Torah as his lodestar has the ability to navigate the murky, stormy waters of life, to battle the winds that can throw his ship off course, to move forward despite the strong changing currents that smash against his ship. He can ride the towering waves that come crashing down. Yes, as long as he keeps his eyes trained on that guiding light, he is assured that his ship will stay its course.

Torah is Hashem's directive to His People through which He speaks to us. We have only to listen. For those who have difficulty hearing its message at first, we have erudite, G-d-fearing Torah scholars who are available to provide us with its interpretation. Their teachings are *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, lessons and sage advice from a mind honed only on Torah. The Torah is referred to as *Toras emes*, the Torah of truth, since it is Hashem's words, His communication; it is *emes l'amito*, Absolute unembellished truth.

The World *Agudas Yisrael* was established in 1912 at a conference held in Katowice, Poland. The goal of the conference and the crux of *Agudas Yisrael*'s purpose was the strengthening of Orthodoxy and its institutions and to infuse its adherents with a sense of global unity. To this end, the organizers felt it prudent to headline the conference with a premier Torah personality, a leader whose erudition was without peer and whose commitment to Torah was incontestable. They turned to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik*, zl, of Brisk to address the conference as its primary speaker. The presence of the illustrious *Rosh Yeshivah* would send a powerful message concerning the significance of this auspicious convocation. *Rav Chaim* demurred, claiming that he did not involve himself in public forums. He was a *Rosh Yeshivah/Rav* to whom Torah study was sacrosanct and his only area of endeavor. He was *kulo Torah*, wholly devoted to Torah study, throughout every fiber of his essence.

When the organizers heard *Rav Chaim*'s negative response, they turned to the *Chafetz Chaim*, zl, who was one of the prime motivators of this event. He felt that a strong, unified *Agudah* would fortify *Klal Yisrael* against the winds of assimilation and secularism that were blowing very strongly, unabated by any bulwark to prevent them from penetrating the Orthodox perimeter. The *Chafetz Chaim* sent a personal messenger to petition *Rav Chaim* to attend and speak. Understandably, when the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest of world Jewry, asks, one responds affirmatively. *Rav Chaim* agreed to attend and address the assemblage.

On the appointed day, Orthodox Jews from all walks of life converged on Katowice. *Roshei Yeshivah*, *Rabbanim*, *Admorim*, Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian and German Jews of all stripes sat together as what they were: family. The conference began with a recitation of *Tehillim*, followed by the opening address, rendered by *Horav David Hoffman*, zl, author of *Melamaid L'hoil*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin and premier German and European *posek*, *halachic* arbiter. The next speaker, who would define the purpose and motif of the conference, was the *Brisker Rav*, *Rav Chaim Soloveitchik*.

Rav Chaim began with the following words, "*Morai v'Rabbosai*, my friends, I would like to share with you a story from which we can deduce the approach we are to take to living as committed Jews. A Jew who lived in a small village earned his livelihood by traveling from town to town selling his wares. He would leave his home on Sunday morning and return for *Shabbos*. One day, he arrived in a village and entered the grocery store with the intention of purchasing something to eat. He asked the man who was working behind the register the price of certain cookies; the response was, 'Drei' (three ruble). He pointed to another item and inquired about its price, 'Drei.' A third item was presented to the young man and the price had not changed: 'Drei.' Something was not right. He asked to meet the owner of the establishment. The young man pointed to the back of the store.

The man entered the owner's "office" and said, "It is not my custom to mix in business that is not mine; I feel that when one can prevent a Jew from losing money, however, he must intervene. You are about to lose your grocery business. That young manager is selling everything for 'three' ruble. He is even selling normally expensive, valuable items for the low price of three ruble. Why are you doing this?"

The storekeeper smiled and explained, "The young man who manages my grocery store was born mute. After years of programs and private tutors, they

were able to teach him one word: *Drei*. That is all he knows and, thus, all he will ever be able to vocalize. The young man spent some time searching for work, anything that would provide him with some livelihood. He was unsuccessful in finding work. I owed his father a debt of gratitude, however, that went back twenty years. I, too, was without work and unable to support myself. I ended up in prison for stealing a few ruble so that I could buy food. This young man's father, at great expense to himself, was able to procure my release. The least I could do was provide an avenue for his son to find meaningful work. Knowing fully well that this young man can articulate only one word, *Drei*. I arranged everything in the store in bags, with each bag priced at three ruble. Obviously, the more valuable the item, the smaller the bag. Thus, if for instance, one pound of grapes was 6 ruble, I prepared bags that were only half a pound, and so on and so forth. Indeed, every bag in the store is three ruble. All bags are not the same size."

Rav Chaim concluded his story, stopped for a moment, and looked at the thousands of Jews who sat before him: "I was born a 'mute,' and, throughout the years, I have been educated to learn only one word: Torah. That is all I know. Thousands have converged here on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. Everyone is prepared with worthy ideas, programs, etc. to elevate and intensify our personal and collective commitment to *Yiddishkeit*. This is all wonderful and meaningful. I ask only one thing: Every decision, agreement, mandate, petition that arises from this gathering should all be individually placed in a 'bag' in such a manner that when 'I' (who can say only one word) am asked, 'What is this?' I will be able to say, 'Torah.' This is the only word that I know, because this is the only criterion that matters. It is either Torah – or it is insignificant." With that, *Rav Chaim* concluded his address and returned to his seat. The conference's motif had been defined and launched. The leadership was now empowered to follow through on the criterion set forth by *Rav Chaim*.

שוננתם לבניך

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children. (6:7)

Rashi comments that "children" is not an exclusive category. It applies, likewise, to one's students, since the Torah considers students to be like children. We have a responsibility to reach out and teach, or see to it that all children are taught. If one has limited time, and he must decide between teaching his own children or someone else's children, however, his children take precedence. *Horav Yechezkel Sarna*, zl, *Rosh Yeshivas Chevron*, and premier expositor of the Slabodka approach to *gadlus ha'adam*, the greatness of man, was a prime example of a *Rosh Yeshivah/Rebbe* to whom his *talmidim*, students, were like children. Indeed, he wondered (concerning the above *Rashi*), if students are included in the injunction of teaching Torah, why did the Torah not simply write *V'sheenantam l'talmidecha*? He explains that the Torah is actually referring to the attitude that should prevail in the loving relationship between a *rebbe* and *talmid* – no different than a father to his son. If I may add that the student's attitude must be reciprocal – like a son to his father. One does not go without the other; otherwise, something is not right.

An incident occurred in the *yeshivah* in which one of the *bachurim*, students, was stricken with a bout of mental illness. He became quite ill, to the point that the *Rosh Yeshivah* decided that he had no recourse but to have him admitted to a medical facility that specialized in treating mental illness. Two of the older students, who had distinguished themselves both in learning and in their relationship with the *Rosh Yeshivah* (thus feeling that they could talk freely and express their feelings), decided to ask *Rav Sarna* how he could do such a thing. (They probably felt that the student would not receive the proper care and that, by being sent away, he was being neglected.)

The two students decided to present their feelings to the *Rosh Yeshivah*. They knocked on his door, and, as soon as he opened it, they asked, "How does one send a *bachur* from the *yeshivah* away? If that *bachur* was the *Rosh Yeshivah*'s son, would our *Rebbe* have acted likewise? Would the *Rosh Yeshivah* have sent his own son to such a facility?" It was obvious that these two *bachurim* were infused more with temerity than with rationale. It was clear that the *Rosh Yeshivah* would be compelled to respond in a strong and decisive manner. *Horav Meir Chodosh*, zl, the *Mashgiach* of Chevron, who happened to be sitting with *Rav Sarna*, wisely decided that this would be a good time to leave.

Rav Sarna looked at the two *bachurim* and asked, "Did you eat breakfast?" The two young men looked at one another incredulously and then turned back to the *Rosh Yeshivah* and replied, "Yes."

"Did you sleep well last night?" *Rav Sarna* asked. Once again, they replied affirmatively, not knowing where *Rav Sarna* was going with this line of questioning.

"I did not sleep last night, or the night before, or the night before. I also have been unable to eat for days. Do you want to know why? Do you want to know what is troubling me, what it is that is preventing me from eating or sleeping? It is the current situation of your *chaver*, colleague. He is my son. After all, he is a student of the *yeshivah*. As such, he is my son. The anxiety and worry I harbor concerning his present condition permits me neither to eat nor sleep."

"On the contrary, since you came with the directive that I treat him as a son, then, by extension, he is your brother. How are you able to eat and sleep

1. The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 6:9) says that the mitzvah applies to someone “pronouncedly old,” which does not appear to have an obvious, objective criterion.

2. Based on the words of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (end of Chapter 5), ben shiv’im le-seivah, the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch rule that these laws apply to a person of the age of 70.

3. The Arizal is quoted as being strict to observe this mitzvah for people who have reached the age of 60 (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:4).

However, the Tur explains that the Rambam’s term “pronouncedly old” means 70, and that he is not disputing the Rambam in this matter.

In addition, there are various interpretations why the Arizal applied this mitzvah to someone who achieved the age of 60. Most conclude that the Arizal agrees with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, but that he had a personal chumrah, which was not halachically required, to stand up for a person once the honoree turned 60. Therefore, most rule that even those who follow kabbalistic practices are required to rise only for someone who is 70 years old (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:1; Leiv Meivin).

The halachic conclusion follows the opinion of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch, ruling that the requirement to stand up for an older person applies only when the older person is at least 70 years old. This halacha holds true today, notwithstanding that 70 is no longer considered advanced in age.

An older person may be mocheil on his honor, and someone who knows that a particular person really does not want people to stand up for him should follow the older person’s wishes. Disregarding his personal desire is not demonstrating respect.

No respect

There is no requirement to rise and show respect when you are in a place where demonstrating respect is inappropriate, such as a bathhouse or bathroom.

When do you stand?

The requirement to stand up for a talmid chochom or an older person applies only when he is within four amos, approximately seven feet, of where you are. There are exceptions to this rule. There is a requirement to stand up for the person who taught you most of the Torah that you know, called your rebbi muvhak. In this case, you are required to stand up once you see the rebbi walking by, even at a distance (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 244:13).

Why four amos?

If you stand up when the talmid chochom or the older person is within your four amos, it is apparent that the reason you stood up is to honor him.

Don’t lose work time

There is an interesting halachic ruling, that there is no requirement to rise and show respect when a person will lose work time as a result. Therefore, a self-employed person is not required to stand up, should he be working when an elderly person comes by, and a worker in the employ of someone else is not permitted to rise while he is working, since he is taking away from the time he owes his employer. In other words, an employee is not permitted to be machmir and stand up when it costs money to a third party. Although one can argue that, in today’s business environment which accepts reasonable coffee breaks and other occasional, brief interruptions, it is permitted for an employee to stand up to show respect for a talmid chochom, we learn a very important lesson how halacha views the responsibility of an employee to his employer. This discussion will be left for a different, future article.

Standing up while learning Torah

The halacha is that someone in the middle of studying Torah is required to stand up for a talmid chochom or for an elderly person (when the halacha requires, as explained above). This is because of a general rule that performing mitzvos of the Torah pushes aside studying Torah.

Transported

What is the halacha, if the elderly person is being carried or wheeled in a wheelchair? Is there still a responsibility to rise when he passes within four amos? The answer is that there is a responsibility to rise when the elderly person passes by, regardless as to whether he is walking or being transported (see Kiddushin 33b). Therefore, it is required to stand up when an older person passes you while he is being pushed in a wheelchair.

As I mentioned above, you are required to stand up for an elderly person, once he is within four amos of where you are. There is a dispute among authorities whether you may sit down as soon as the scholar, or elderly person, passes by, or whether you should wait to sit down until he has passed beyond your four amos (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:12; Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 244:13).

At this point, we can address our opening question:

“Am I required to stand up anytime I see a senior citizen walking down the street?”

The answer is that if he is over seventy years old (or appears to be), observes halacha, and you are not busy earning a living, you are required to stand up for him, once he is within your four amos.

In shul or while davening?

Is there a mitzvah to stand up for a talmid chochom or an elderly person when you are in the middle of davening? There is an authority who contends that since you are in the middle of showing respect to Hashem, you should not, then, show respect for a human, who is, himself, required to show respect to Hashem (quoted by Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:1). However, the other halachic authorities disagree, contending that fulfilling Hashem’s mitzvah is showing respect to Hashem, and, therefore, should be observed while you are davening (see Birkei Yosef ad locum and Shu”t Radbaz that he quotes).

Your whole house

The Birkei Yosef raises the following question: In general, halacha considers your entire house to be one area of four amos. This has many halachic ramifications. For example, upon awaking in the morning most people wash their hands somewhere in the house, without being careful that they walk less than four amos before doing so.

The question he raises is whether we consider the entire house to be four amos germane to standing up for an older person. If we do, that would mean that whenever you are indoors and you see an older person walking around or being transported in the same house, you are required to remain standing up for him until he reaches his destination, even if he never comes within your four amos!

The halachic authorities conclude that there is no difference between being inside or being outside – in either instance, you are not required to stand until the older person is within your four amos. This is because the point of four amos germane to this mitzvah is that a greater distance away is not apparent that you are standing to demonstrate honor. This is true whether you are indoors or outdoors, and, therefore, there is no requirement to stand up indoors for an older person until he is within your four amos (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:5).

Discordant scholar

The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 244:13) rules that there is no requirement to stand up to show respect for a Torah scholar who creates disputes that are not for the sake of Heaven. This ruling would also apply to an elderly person who creates disputes that are not lesheim shamayim. Even if he meets the age requirement and is observant, if he is a baal machlokes, there is no mitzvah to rise for him.

Can’t see

Does the mitzvah to stand up for a talmid chochom or an elderly person apply when the honoree will be unaware that you did so, such as, if he cannot see? The She’eilos Utoshuvos Halachos Ketanos (1:154) rules that you are not required to stand up for an older person who cannot see that you did so (quoted by Shearim Hametzuyanim Behalacha 144:5). However, many other authorities dispute this conclusion (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 244:2).

Conclusion

When the posuk (Bereishis 24:1) mentions that Avraham Avinu got older, it uses the expression, ba bayamim, “he came with his days,” the first time this expression occurs in Chumash, even though many people had lived much longer than Avraham. The Gemara explains that this was the first instance of a person looking like an old man. Most people are sensitive about looking older, but the Midrash writes that Avraham Avinu asked to look elderly, so that people would know to treat him with respect! As the Gemara expresses it, “Until the time of Avraham, there was no concept in the world of people looking old. Someone who wanted to talk to Avraham, would (by mistake) go to Yitzchok, since they looked so similar, and vice versa. Avraham then prayed to Hashem, and the concept of appearing elderly began for the first time in history” (Bava Metzia 87a). The Bereishis Rabbah adds, “Avraham requested to look old. He said to Hashem, ‘Creator of all worlds, a man and his son can arrive in a place, and no one knows which of them to honor. If you crown him with the appearance of being elderly, people know whom to honor!’ Hashem answered him. ‘You requested it; it will begin with you.’ From the beginning of the Torah, until Avraham, there is no mention of anyone getting old” (Bereishis Rabbah 65:9).

Avraham Avinu’s outlook should serve as a wise counterbalance to modern society’s adulation and adoration of youth. This approach makes aging something to dread, rather than something deserving of respect. Instead, Avraham Avinu referred to signs of advanced age as a well-earned “crown.”

לע”ג

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביליא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה

Parshas Vaeschanan: V'ZOT HATORAH, THIS IS THE TORAH

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. BACK TO SINAI

As we discussed in last week's shiur, the first third of Sefer D'varim (Chapters 1-11) is essentially a historic retelling of some of the major events which happened to the previous generation - the generation of the Exodus (Dor Yotz'ei Mitzrayim). In the first three chapters (Parashat D'varim), Moshe Rabbeinu recounts some of the military and conquest data, including those which this new generation - the generation of Conquest (Dor Ba'ei ha'Aretz) - had experienced.

Over the course of the next 8 chapters (4-11), Moshe intersperses a long speech relating to the Stand at Sinai with exhortative and inspirational instruction, commonly called Mussar. Although we would certainly expect the Revelation to play a central role in his retelling, the style and method of that recitation raises several questions.

[The reader is strongly encouraged to have a Tanakh open for the rest of the shiur].

Note that there is not one seamless account here; rather, we have several descriptions of the Stand at Sinai, as follows:

- 1) 4:9-15
- 1') 4:32-36
- 2) 5:2-29
- 3) 9:7-10:11

This division is accurate if we look at the specific verses which are direct explications of the Sinai experience. If, however, we look at each description through a wider lens, we can divide them into larger speeches. In order to do so, we need to note that each description is prefaced with necessary introductions (as will be clarified below) as well as the implications of the Stand at Sinai, which reverberate through many more verses than those outlined. I would like to suggest that there are three description-sets here, as follows:

- 1) 4:1-40
- 2) 5:1-6:3
- 3) 9:7-10:11

[Again, I suggest that the reader follow each section with a Tanakh in hand; these divisions will become apparent at first inspection. Not only are the Parashiot broken up this way in the text, but the speeches flow rather seamlessly within these divisions. There is yet another "text-clue" which points to this division - but more on that later.]

II. 'AREI MIKLAT: (CITIES OF REFUGE)

For purposes of our shiur, we will direct our analysis to the two speeches in Parashat Va'Et'hanan - 4:1-40 and 5:1-6:3. Note that these two descriptions are interrupted with a brief narrative about Moshe's activities - he assigns the three 'Arei Miklat (cities of refuge) on the East Bank of the Jordan. Why are Moshe's speeches interrupted with this narrative?

In addition, there is a peculiarly significant verse placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative. Significant because it is a broad statement about Torah and Moshe's rule in teaching Torah to the Jewish people. Peculiar because of its location:

Then Moshe set apart on the east side of the Jordan three cities to which a homicide could flee, someone who unintentionally kills another person, the two not having been at enmity before; the homicide could flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland belonging to the B'nei Re'uven, Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the B'nei Gad, and Golan in Bashan belonging to the B'nei Menasheh.

V'Zot haTorah Asher Sam Moshe liPh'nei V'nei Yisra'el

(And this is the Torah that Moshe placed before the B'nei Yisra'el)

These are the decrees and the statutes and ordinances that Moshe spoke to the Israelites when they had come out of Egypt, beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-P'or, in the land of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned at Heshbon, whom Moshe and the Israelites defeated when they came out of Egypt. They occupied his land and the land of King Og of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan: from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon), together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah. (D'varim 4:41-49)

Why is this central verse (which we declare every time the Sefer Torah is raised for us to see) placed in the middle of a

Parashah about 'Arei Miklat?

III. SH'MA YISR'AEL

Before responding to our questions - two more are in order. We are all familiar with what is perhaps the most famous and central verse in the Torah - Sh'ma Yisra'el, Hashem Eloheinu, Hashem Echad (6:4) Note that this verse comes immediately after the second "Sinai speech". What is the significance of its placement here? Moreover, what is the meaning of the two introductory words - Sh'ma Yisra'el?

...and one final question. Note that the beginning of each of the "Sinai-speeches" begins with a curiously similar phrase (one which shows up a number of times in D'varim - and only in D'varim):

4:1 - So now, Yisra'el, give heed (Yisra'el Sh'ma) to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that Hashem, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

5:1 - Mosheh convened all Yisra'el, and said to them: Hear, O Yisra'el (Sh'ma Yisra'el), the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently.

Why does each speech begin with the familiar Sh'ma Yisra'el (albeit in inverted fashion in the first instance)?

SUMMARY

In all, we have asked seven questions regarding Mosheh's speeches and the one narrative in our Parashah:

- * Why are the two major speeches both about the Stand at Sinai?
- * Why is that speech divided into two via the 'Arei Miklat interruption?
- * What is the import of the 'Arei Miklat narrative here?
- * Why is the "banner-verse" v'Zot haTorah... placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative?
- * What is the rationale behind the placement of the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el... section?
- * What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?
- * Why does each of the first two Sinai-speeches begin with Sh'ma Yisra'el?

IV. MOSHEH "RABBENU" IN ACTION

In last week's shiur, we discussed the job of a Rabbi and how Mosheh earned his reputation as "Mosheh Rabbenu" (Moses our Teacher), his eternal title, when he brought the past into the present for the second generation. This was, as we described, the first task of a Rabbi - to bridge generational gaps and to bring the students back to Sinai. Mosheh began this mission in Parashat D'varim with his educationally sophisticated history lesson.

The second job of a Rabbi - is to be the "Shadchan" between his students and haKadosh Barukh Hu. He must inspire his charges to seek out their own relationship with God and he must continue to guide them in the development of that relationship.

After Mosheh established the bridge between the Dor Yotz'ei Mitzrayim (generation of the Exodus) and Dor Ba'ei ha'Aretz (generation of the Conquest), he began to instruct the people about their personal (and individual) relationships with God.

This process, however, can never be accomplished in one single lesson. There are various sophisticated steps which must be taken to guide others to the Ribono shel Olam (Master of the Universe) - and each of them is a lesson in and of itself. This is as true about Mosheh and his students as it is today.

Just like any relationship, the person endeavoring to enter into an interaction with God must learn about two things - the nature of the "Other" (in this case, God) and the medium of that relationship (in this case, Mitzvot).

With one introductory hypothesis, we will see how these lessons are presented by Mosheh in an educationally sequential format.

V. SH'MA YISRA'EL: INTRODUCTION OF A LESSON

The hypothesis is as follows: The phrase Sh'ma Yisra'el which introduces each of the three major speeches in our Parashah, is indeed an introduction - of a new lesson. This explains the unique relationship between this phrase and Sefer D'varim, which is (as we explained in last week's shiur), a session in Mosheh Rabbenu's Beit Midrash. This also explains the division of the various lessons in our Parashah, as follows:

THE FIRST LESSON: Hashem IS THE ONE TRUE GOD

The first Sinai-speech (4:1-40) is about the Revelation - as an explanation of the Nature of God (as much as can be understood). True to the "negative theology" popularized by Rambam (in which all that we can know about God is what we can negate about Him - e.g. He is not weak etc.), most of this Parashah is a warning that we should not confuse any of the manifestations we experienced at Sinai with God Himself:

Since you saw no form when Hashem spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure - the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that Hashem your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. (D'varim 4:15-19)

Indeed, the end of this speech is a reminder of God's singular and unique existence and that He alone is the one God:

To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that Hashem is God; there is no other besides him...So acknowledge today and take to heart that Hashem is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. (4:35,39)

The focus of this speech is about who God is, as it were, and who He is not. [Note how Rambam, in the beginning of *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* (Laws of Idolatry), outlines the "history" of idolatry.]

THE SECOND LESSON: THE VALIDITY OF MOSHEH'S PROPHECY

Reading through the second Sinai-speech (5:1-6:3), we see that the implications of the Revelation are not about the essence of God and the dangers of idolatry attendant upon confusion arising from that Revelation; rather, it is a retelling of the people's reaction in response to that great moment:

[Immediately after the "review" of the Decalogue...] These words Hashem spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and He added no more (or He never ceased - see Rashi). He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; and you said, "Look, Hashem our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of Hashem our God any longer, we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? Go near, you yourself, and hear all that Hashem our God will say. Then tell us everything that Hashem our God tells you, and we will listen and do it." Hashem heard your words when you spoke to me, and Hashem said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." You must therefore be careful to do as Hashem your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. You must follow exactly the path that Hashem your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess. Now this is the commandment... (D'varim 5:22-6:1)

As is readily seen, the focus of this speech is the people's reaction to the Revelation (fear) and their appointment of Mosheh as their "go-between" to receive the rest of God's commandments.

This established Mosheh as the "Lawgiver" (Mehokek - see D'varim 33:21) - and enabled him to then instruct the B'nei Yisra'el regarding all of the other Mitzvot (besides the Decalogue) which they had not directly heard from God.

In summary, we have two lessons in our Parashah, each based on the experience at Sinai - and each introduced with the Sh'ma Yisra'el formula.

The first lesson is about God - and the second is about Torah. In other words, the first introduces the B'nei Yisra'el to the object of their relationship, while the second describes the vehicle for that relationship.

Why then is the narrative regarding 'Arei Miklat placed between these two speeches?

VI. THE "HIDDUSH" (NOVELTY) OF 'AREI MIKLAT

We take it for granted that intention (Kavvanah) plays a central role in religious behavior - that our attitude and focus while performing Mitzvot affects the spiritual impact (and, in some cases, the Halakhic consequences) of those actions. There is, however, very little indication of this central religious component in the first four books of the Torah. The one exception is in relation to the Mishkan - specifically in the world of Korbanot (offerings). Outside of this, we only find out about prohibited actions (e.g. stealing, eating Hametz on Pesach) and obligations (returning a theft, eating Matzah on Pesach) - but we do not hear very much about the role of intent in Halakhah.

The one powerful exception to this is the rule of manslaughter, as outlined in Bamidbar 25 (although it is alluded to in Sh'mot 21:13 - see Rashi ad loc.). In case someone intentionally murders a fellow, he is liable for death. On the other

hand, if it is an unintentional act ("manslaughter"), the killer has the benefit of the protection of the city of refuge - and the blood relative may not go there and exact vengeance for his dead relative.

The laws of murder/manslaughter are complex and demand a serious investigation, to understand the various shades of intent and how they apply to the case before the Beit Din.

The reason that, with this exception, the first four books of the Torah do not address the issue of intent is that they are the "instructions" about our relationships with each other and with God. Sefer D'varim, on the other hand, is Mosheh's instruction on HOW to relate to God - not just which actions to take, but which attitudes should accompany them.

Mosheh, therefore, interrupts his lessons about that relationship and does what every great teacher does - he demonstrates (instead of just preaching) how to put this lesson into action.

This is a critical piece of Torah - Mosheh has just taught a philosophical piece about the nature of God. Yet Judaism is not just philosophic speculation and meditation - it demands action. Therefore, Mosheh acts to demonstrate this component. Yet - the Mitzvah he chooses to demonstrate shows us the integration of intent/attitude and action.

And...Zot haTorah - "This is the Torah". In the middle of his lesson, Mosheh stops to perform a Mitzvah which demonstrates, better than any other, the complementary nature of action and attitude - and this is, indeed, the Torah. To borrow from Hillel - all the rest is commentary. In other words, the lesson of 'Arei Miklat is a lesson about the entire Torah.

After teaching this valuable lesson (by example), Mosheh goes on to teach that Torah (the Decalogue) and now, instead of introducing God, he introduces the Mehokek - himself!

Mosheh is now "set up" to teach them how to fully develop their relationship with God.

VII. SH'MA YISRA'EL: THE TELOS OF TORAH

Now we come to the third lesson - the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el. What is the essence of this lesson?

Sh'ma Yisra'el: Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

We are commanded to do more than follow a series of actions - and obey restrictions - ordained by God. We are called to be in a relationship with God, a relationship of love, commitment, constancy and much more. The next 6 chapters are replete with Mosheh's reminders to love God, to fear Him, to cleave to Him, to swear by His Name etc. None of this was mentioned anywhere earlier in the Torah - again, Mosheh is acting as the consummate Rebbi, bringing his students into the full sense of the relationship with God.

This is the third lesson - once we have been "introduced" to God and to his lawgiver (who can accurately convey His commands), we are taught about the ultimate goal of these commands - to love God, to fear Him, to walk in His ways etc.

We can now go back to our original questions and answer:

* Why are the two major speeches both about the Stand at Sinai?

- each teaches us about a different implication of that experience; the first teaches us about WHO God is, the second about the vehicle for entering into a relationship with Him (Torah) and the "Shadchan" (Mosheh Rabbenu).

* Why is that speech divided into two via the 'Arei-Miklat interruption?

- as above, each teaches a distinct lesson.

* What is the import of the 'Arei Miklat narrative here?

- Mosheh Rabbenu is teaching, by example, the importance of integrating intent/attitude with action in fulfilling Mitzvot.

* Why is the "banner-verse" v'Zot haTorah... placed in the middle of the 'Arei Miklat narrative?

- this is a central lesson of Torah - that action alone is not enough and that the consequences of a person's actions depend on the approach with which he acts.

* What is the rationale behind the placement of the "famous" Sh'ma Yisra'el... section?

- after teaching us about God and about the vehicle for entering into a relationship with Him, Mosheh teaches us about the ultimate goal of those Mitzvot.

* What does Sh'ma Yisra'el mean?

- it is the introduction of a new "lesson"

* Why does each of the first two Sinai-speeches begin with Sh'ma Yisra'el?

- as above, each is a lesson in and of itself.

VIII. POSTSCRIPT

One question which remains is about the order of these lessons - wouldn't it have been more appropriate to teach about the "love" for God before our commitment via Mitzvot? Aren't we motivated to action because of our feelings for the one (or One) on whose behalf we are acting?

I once heard a beautiful explanation of this - albeit in a slightly different context - from Mori haRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l. The Rov compared the two statements of Hazal regarding "Imitatio Dei":

A) "Just as He is gracious, you should be gracious; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate etc." (BT Shabbat 133b)

B) "Just like He comforted the bereaved, so you comfort the bereaved; just as He visited the sick, so you visit the sick etc." (BT Sotah 14a)

He noted that in the first statement we are called to imitate Divine characteristics, as it were. The second statement, on the other hand, challenges us to imitate Divine actions, so to speak.

Instead of seeing these as either contradictory or parallel (but unrelated) statements, the Rov explained that the two of them are linked in series.

Unlike the way that the "world" thinks, that we act on behalf of someone because we care about them, the Torah is teaching us how to develop that compassion - by acting on their behalf. We do not develop good character by being born with it or waiting for it to come to us - we become compassionate by behaving compassionately. The second statement, imitating Divine actions (which the Torah mandates - see MT Evel 14:1), comes first, as it were. The second mandate, imitating Divine character, is the result of fulfilling the first.

In the same way, we understand why the Torah prefaced the "emotional" connection with God with the "mechanical" one. We come to love and fear God (and desire to cleave to Him) not as a motivation for fulfilling Mitzvot - rather as the result of that fulfillment.

We can also see this in the Parashah of K'riat Sh'ma:

Sh'ma Yisra'el: Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

(and how do we come to this intense level of commitment and love?)

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(See Sifri Va'Et'hanan #8, where the command to study is seen as a method for achieving love for God)

Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

PARASHAT VA-ET'HANAN

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's shiur will be unusually brief.

Usually, our discussions of the parasha pose analytical questions and work toward analytical answers. This is because the messages of the Torah are often not explicit. When the Torah tells us stories, it usually does not pause to give us the moral of the story as well. It is our job to make meaning of the events the Torah reports. Similarly, the Torah does not often provide rationales for the mitzvot it legislates; it is our job to speculate educatedly on what values lie behind the Torah's commands (always remembering that our rationale for a particular mitzva may be incorrect and therefore should not affect our performance of the mitzva) and to try to internalize those values.

In general, in the four sefarim (books) through which we have already learned, the Torah addresses primarily us, the readers, and expects us to take the time and trouble to unpack the narratives and mitzvot for their meaning. We assume the Torah is a text packed with complex meaning: why does the Torah tell Story A or Story B the way it does? Why does it include details X and Y but leave out detail Z? What key words appear with significant frequency in this or that account? What does Hashem want us to understand when He commands us to "be holy"? Is there some way we can grasp the point of the korbanot (sacrifices), or the status of tum'a (impurity) and tahara (purity)?

Most of Sefer Devarim, on the other hand, primarily addresses Moshe's listeners. We, later readers of the text of Moshe's speeches, are a sort of secondary audience. Because Moshe means for his listeners to quickly understand what he is saying as he says it, he does a lot of the "work" for them. Instead of simply recounting the few events he thinks are important for the people to reflect on, he recounts the events **and** often explicitly gives them meaning. Often, his goal is to remind the people of past failures in order to warn them against repeating these mistakes, or to remind them of critical national experiences which they might forget. Recountings of these types fill our parasha. What, then, is there to think about in these parshiot?

One tactic is to compare Moshe's version of the stories he tells to the original version as reported in earlier sefarim. We have used this approach in considering the story of the appointment of judge-officers and the story of the meraglim (spies). This approach could also keep us busy this week, comparing the Aseret Ha-Dibberot (Decalogue) as reported here by Moshe to the original version in Parashat Yitro. But we will not be focusing on that issue.

Another tactic -- quite different than the comparison strategy described above -- is to focus on the particular textual characteristics of Sefer Devarim. Much of the material of this week's parasha and the adjacent parshiot is not fully encompassed by the kind of analytical scrutiny to which we normally subject the week's parasha. These parshiot present us with aspects which do not bear much analysis or explication: the aesthetic, literary, and affective characteristics of the text. These aspects are best discerned not by reading short sections of text, or even whole parshiot -- they become most apparent when you read quickly through really large sections of the text of Sefer Devarim, particularly from 1:1 to 11:32. (This occurred to me the first time I acted as a Ba'al Korei -- Torah reader -- for these parshiot. Practicing the reading, which forced me to cover large sections of text rapidly, made me aware of the "flow" of the text on a large scale.) From 12:1, Moshe's speech becomes much more halakhic, and although his style in this halakhic section bears similarities to the more exhortatory section which begins Sefer Devarim, the literary features are perhaps less noticeable there.

Nehama Leibowitz often said that teachers should never ask students to "repeat what Rashi is saying in your own words." The student would not be made to think and would simply restate -- in worse Hebrew -- what Rashi had said coherently. The same, it seems to me, applies here. I could give you examples of what I mean about the aesthetic, literary, and affective characteristics of the text in our parasha, but I would do a much poorer job than the Torah itself. So there is nothing for it but to grab a Humash and see for yourself.

Let me just give you an idea of the kind of reading I'm referring to. You are standing with your family and friends among a crowd of hundreds of thousands. Moshe Rabbeinu stands on a makeshift platform before the crowd, his voice rising majestically above the throng. Behind him, in the distance, you can see the rising peaks beyond the Jordan, the river you are soon to cross without Moshe. You listen as he speaks passionately, reminding you of where you have been and what you and your parents have done, both good and bad. He warns you of the dangers you will face -- the lure of idolatry, the weakness of cowardice, the arrogance of self-sufficiency -- and drives home again and again that the most important thing of all is to remain faithful to Hashem. He delivers Hashem's promises of reward, reminds you of what Hashem has done and will do for you . . . with deep pathos, he reveals his overpowering desire to enter the Land and Hashem's almost cruel refusal to entertain his request. "But you -- you are going to the Land! You will cross the Jordan and merit the one thing I desire above all else."

Moshe tells the people of Eretz Cana'an, its physical beauty and bounty and its intimate connection with Hashem's providence through rainfall. He repeats many times that the Land is given to the people only so long as they remain faithful to Hashem; if not, exile.

Moshe is engaged, above all, in an effort to convince: Keep the Torah. Be faithful to Hashem. You owe it to Him. It will be good for you. The other nations will admire you for it.

(See? I said I wouldn't paraphrase, and then I went and paraphrased. But only to show you how poorly my summary

encompasses the original: go and read it through yourself in one sitting.)

LOYALTY TO HASHEM:

Being "loyal" usually does not imply anything very specific. In some contexts, loyalty does take on specific connotations -- a "loyal" or "faithful" spouse, for example -- but usually, loyalty means being supportive and faithful in general terms. In describing the kind of loyalty that Hashem demands of us, Moshe specifies both specific and general loyalty. With relentless frequency, Moshe urges us to be faithful to Hashem by keeping halakha, Hashem's laws:

4:1 -- "Now, Yisrael, hear the LAWS and STATUTES which I am teaching you to do"

4:5 -- "See, I have taught you LAWS and STATUTES, as Hashem, my God, commanded me, [for you] to do in the Land to which are going to inherit it.

4:14 - "Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you STATUTES and LAWS, to do them in the Land to which you shall pass to inherit it.

4:40 -- "You shall keep His STATUTES and COMMANDMENTS which I command you today"

5:1 -- "Listen, Yisrael, to the STATUTES and LAWS which I speak in your ears"

5:28 -- "You shall guard, to do as Hashem, your God, COMMANDED you"

6:1 -- "This is the COMMAND, the STATUTES and the LAWS which Hashem, your God, commanded"

There are many more such examples, but these should demonstrate the point. Being loyal to Hashem does not imply only a general faithfulness to Him (or to the "golden rule"), it means, quite particularly, obeying everything He has commanded us. It does not mean just a commitment to justice, or social justice, or kindness, or charity, or national unity, or morality, or equality, or to any other value, however important. It does not mean having concern for spirituality, holiness, sanctity, piety, or anything else. It means doing the mitzvot, plain and simple, not just because they contain and express positive values which are "right," but simply because Hashem has commanded them and we are His loyal servants.

It follows that you cannot violate the mitzvot as an individual or as part of a group and be a loyal servant of Hashem. You cannot create (as some groups have) a Jewish religious structure which abrogates Hashem's laws and still consider yourself loyal to Hashem. If there is one message of this week's parasha, it is that Judaism is not a "do-it-yourself" religion. We don't replace the Torah's expression of Hashem's will with what we feel is right, because Judaism is not only about values, it is about serving Hashem. Certainly, human beings are meant to participate in deciding what the halakha should be, but they are meant to do so with a deep and across-the-board acknowledgment of the absolute binding nature of Hashem's law. One of the highest praises accorded to people in Tanakh is "eved Hashem" -- "the servant of Hashem." An eved Hashem is not just someone who does the right thing, he does it as a faithful, loyal servant of Hashem, submitting to His will. This appellation is accorded to only a select few: Moshe, Ya'akov, David, and several others -- including the Messiah.

The other side of loyalty to Hashem is the general, non-halakhic meaning of the word: faithfulness, fealty, support. This is expressed by Moshe in our parasha in several formulations. One of the most common expressions of this sort of fealty is Moshe's frequent warnings about serving false gods. Interestingly, avoda zara ("worship of strange gods," or "strange worship") is often formulated as a form of ingratitude, not simply as a theological falsehood:

4:19-20 -- "Lest you lift your eyes heavenward, and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, and you shall be misled, and bow down to them, and serve them . . . but Hashem took you and brought you out from the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be to Him a people of inheritance."

Our rejection of Hashem and embrace of false gods is not simply foolish and false, it is ungrateful: Hashem has chosen us as His nation, bringing us out of slavery and granting us a homeland. We are bound to remain faithful to Him in return.

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

for PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN & EKEV

The first two parshiot of 'kriyat shema' surround us each and every day of our lives. In the following shiur, as we begin our study of the main speech of Sefer Devarim, we'll explain why these two 'parshiot' are so important, [This shiur will also serve as a continuation to our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim, as it discusses in greater detail the overall structure of the main speech.]

INTRODUCTION

Our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim discussed how the first 26 chapters of Sefer Devarim divide into two speeches:

1. The introductory speech (chapters 1-4);

- explaining why forty years have passed, followed by a short 'pep-talk' to prepare the nation for their conquest of the land, and the laws that they'll need to keep.

2. The main speech (chapters 5-26);

- in which Moshe reviews the actual set of laws (originally given at Har Sinai) that Bnei Yisrael must keep as they establish their nation after they conquer the Land, adding some 'rebuke' as he reviews them.

The following shiur will focus more directly on the internal structure of this main speech, showing how and why its commandments neatly divide into two distinct sections:

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

Recall how Moshe Rabbeinu began his main speech with the story of how and when these mitzvot (which he is about to teach) were first given (see 5:1-28). In that story, we find an important detail that will help us understand why this speech divides into two sections.

As you review that story, pay careful attention to God's response to the people's request that Moshe should teach them laws, instead of hearing them directly from God:
"Go say to them: 'Return to your tents', but you [Moshe] remain here with Me and I will transmit to you:
- the **mitzva** & the **chukim u'mishpatim** -
which you shall teach them..." (see 5:27-28).

Note the key phrases "**ha-mitzva**" & "**chukim u'mishpatim**" in this pasuk. As we continue our study of Sefer Devarim we will show how often these two phrases are repeated, and how they will introduce the two key sections of main speech:

- A) - **ha-mitzva** [chapters 6 to 11]
- B) - **chukim & mishpatim** [chapters 12-26]

To see how this develops, we must carefully follow the continuation of Moshe's speech (from this point).

Now that Moshe has told the story of how he received these laws, he is now ready to teach them, but first - he interjects a few words of encouragement concerning their importance:
"You shall keep [these laws] to do them as God has commanded you....in all the way which God has commanded you, in order that you may live and be well, and prolong your days in the land which you shall possess" (5:29-30).

At this point, Moshe is finally ready to 'tell over' those laws which he received on Har Sinai, as he explained in 5:28. Note Moshe's next remark:

"ve-zot ha-mitzva, ha-chukim ve-hamishpatim..."

"And **this** is the **mitzva** and the **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded **me to teach you** to observe on the land which you are about to inherit" (6:1).

Compare this pausk with 5:28, noting how Moshe refers once again to this very same phrase- '**ha-mitzva, chukim & mishpatim**'. Clearly, 6:1 serves as the introduction [note the word 'zot'] to the mitzvot that he will now teach.

Even though the mitzvot should begin in the next pasuk, Moshe once again grabs this opportunity to explain their importance:

"[Keep these laws] so that you will fear the Lord your God, to keep **all** His statutes and commandments, which I command you... so that your days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them - so that you will prosper... as God has promised you - in the land flowing with milk and honey" (see 6:2-3).

THE OPENING STATEMENT

With these introductory comments finally complete, Moshe is now ready to begin the mitzvot themselves - which begin with the famous pasuk of:

"shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem echad" (6:4).

Now we can appreciate why this pasuk is so important, for it serves as the opening statement that begins that entire set of laws that continues through chapter 26.

Even though we all know this pasuk by heart, it's not so simple to translate - for it is not clear whether it is making two points, i.e.

- (1) Hashem is OUR God [and nobody else's]
- (2) Hashem is ONE - i.e. He is the ONLY God

Or, if it is making only one point, that:

- (1) Hashem WHO is our God - He is the ONLY God

The difference between these two translations is immense. The first implies that 'our God' is the best; sort of like - we have the true God, and every other religion is wrong. The second implies that the God who we have a special covenant with - He is the only God - hence it becomes incumbent upon us to represent him properly.

In the context of Sefer Devarim, the second understanding makes much more sense - for this opening statement of the law section is thematically linked to Moshe Rabbeinu's introductory statement - at the beginning of this speech:

"**Hashem Elokeinu** karet imanu brit b'Chorev"

[Hashem, our God make a covenant with **us** at Mount Horev /=Mount Sinai] (see 5:2)

Therefore, it makes sense that "Hashem Elokeinu" (in 6:4) relates to that same theme. If so, then Moshe is prefacing the laws that will follow with an important statement explaining why it is so important for the nation to keep these laws. The God with whom Am Yisrael has joined in covenant [to represent Him as a nation] - He is the only God - and hence, these laws must be kept meticulously.

Recall as well that Moshe had made a similar statement - relating to this same theme - earlier in his first speech (in chapter four), when he explained their underlying purpose:

"See [comprehend] that I am teaching you [in the speech that will follow] **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded **me to teach you** to observe on the land which you are about to inherit [compare with 6:1]

Observe them & keep them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of other nations, so that when they hear all these laws, shall say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there, that had God so close to them, as Hashem our God when ever we call upon Him... (see 4:5-8)

THE FIRST LAW

This most basic principle of faith and purpose - of "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" - is followed by one of the most important mitzvot - for it is a law that relates to one's overall attitude toward serving God and keeping His laws:

"And thou shalt love the **Lord** thy God with all your heart, and all your soul... And these words [i.e. the laws of the main speech] which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart. And you shall teach them repeatedly to your children, and speak about them..." (see 6:5-7).

[Review 6:4-6, noting how they introduced by 6:1-3.]

From this point on, we find a complete set of laws, interspersed with many words of rebuke, which continue all the way until the end of chapter 26. [This overall structure was discussed in last week's shiur, but it is recommended that you take a few minutes to scan through chapters 6 thru 26 to verify this point.]

THE TWO SECTIONS

These laws cover a wide range of topics; however, we will now show how they divide into two distinct sections. To explain why, let's return to the key phrase, which was repeated in 5:28 and 6:1, that sets the stage for this division.

"ve-zot ha-mitzva, ha-chukim ve-hamishpatim..."
"And **this** is the **mitzva** and the **chukim u-mishpatim** that God had commanded me to teach you..." (6:1).

We posit that this entire speech divides into **two** sections, corresponding to these two headers:

- A) the **Ha-mitzva** section - chapters 6-11
[Parshiot Va-etchanan thru Ekev]
- B) the **Chukim & Mishpatim** section - chapters 12-26
[Parshiot Re'eh, Shoftim, Ki Tetze, & Ki Tavo]

To explain how this division works, let's start with the unit that is easy to identify.

'HEADERS' & 'FOOTERS'

Towards the beginning of Parshat Re'eh, we find a short introduction to a specific set of laws that is clearly referred to as '**chukim u-mishpatim**'. To verify this, review these psukim: "For you are about to pass over the Jordan to go in to inherit the land which God is giving you... [There] you shall observe to keep all these **chukim & mishpatim** that I set before you this day" (see 11:31-32).

"**These** are the **chukim & mishpatim** that you are to keep in the land which God gave to your forefathers..." (see 12:1).

As you review chapter 12, note how this opening pasuk (12:1) **introduces** a lengthy list of laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the land - which continues on all the way until the end of chapter 26!

To 'balance' this 'header', towards the end of the speech we find another special pasuk that forms a very appropriate summary (what we refer to as a 'footer') for this entire unit:

"On this day, God is commanding you to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, keep them with all your heart..." (see 26:16).

[Again, if you have time, scan chapters 12 thru 26, noting how there are no 'new headers' in the interim. Note also how many parshiot begin with the word 'ki' [when/if] and 'lo' [do not...], typical for a set of laws (just as we found in the set of laws in Parshat Mishpatim)!]

It was rather easy to identify this matching 'header' and 'footer' for the "**chukim u-mishpatim**" section. Now, we must work 'backwards' to identify the less obvious 'header' & 'footer' for the '**ha-mitzva**' section.

Let's start by taking a closer look at the pasuk that opens the mitzvot of the main speech (as we explained above, i.e. 6:4): "Hear o Israel, the Lord is our God... and you shall **love** God with all your heart and all your soul... and **these** instructions which I '**metzaveh**' [command] you today, teach them to your children..." (see 6:4-6).

This paragraph certainly sounds like an introduction to a set of mitzvot. But to understand what makes this unit special, we consider its opening commandment - to love God ['ahavat Hashem' / see 6:5].

Recall that the Torah refers to this unit as "**ha-mitzva**" - which implies **the** mitzva - or possibly **the** most important mitzva! [In Hebrew grammar, this type of 'heh' is known as 'heh ha-yedi'a' - which stresses the word that follows.]

We posit that the Torah refers to the commandment of 'ahavat Hashem' as - **ha-mitzva** - for it is **the** [most important] mitzvah.

Note as well how the phrase that follows the mitzva of ahavat Hashem is: "ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi **metzaveh** etchem..."

Thus, we conclude that the 'header' for the **ha-mitzva** section is 'shema Yisrael... ve-ahavta...'; now we must locate its 'footer'.

As we would expect to find the 'footer' before the next section begins, let's take a look towards the end of chapter 11.

At the conclusion of Parshat Ekev we find a very 'worthy candidate' for a closing pasuk for this section: "If, then, you faithfully keep – **ha-mitzva ha-zot** - that I command you, to **love** God... to follow His laws and to attach yourselves to Him. Then I will help you conquer the Land..." (see 11:22-25, noting its context!).

Here, not only do we find our key word – **ha-mitzva**, but the same context as well in regard to ahavat Hashem - loving God. Furthermore, this section serves as an appropriate summary, for here the Torah promises should Bnei Yisrael keep the proper attitude of ahavat Hashem, then God will surely assist them with the conquest of the Land.

[As you review 11:26-30, notice how these psukim form a small 'buffer' between these two sections, as the chukim u-mishpatim clearly begin with 11:31-32 which lead right into 12:1. / Note as well how the chapter division seems to have missed this rather obvious point.]

Up until now, we have found textual support for dividing the mitzvot of the main speech into two distinct sections. Now, we must find the primary theme of each section by examining their contents.

SECTION #1 - HA-MITZVA: 'Ahavat Hashem'

The theme of the **ha-mitzva** section is quite easy to identify, for its opening pasuk - as the famous pasuk of 'Shma Yisrael' says it all:

"**Shma Yisrael**... and you shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and soul... and these laws which I "**metzaveh**" - command you this day..." (see 6:4-6).

Note how this general theme of 'to love God in every walk of life' continues in each subsequent parshia which follows.

For example:

* Upon conquering the land, you may inherit an entire city with houses already built and vineyards already planted, etc. Don't let this affluence cause you to forget God... (6:10-15).

* When your children (who did not go through the desert experience) will ask you **why** we have to keep all these mitzvot, remind them and teach them about all the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim... (6:20-25).

* When you conquer your enemy, don't intermarry! etc. (7:1-5).

- * If you become fearful of your enemy, don't worry, remember what God did to Mitzrayim, He can help you as well. (7:17-25).
- * Don't act in a rebellious manner as your forefathers did in the desert (see chapters 8-10).
- * As Eretz Canaan does not have a constant water source (like the Nile in Egypt), you will be dependent on the rainfall in this new land. Therefore, recognize that it is God who gives you rain (and not any other god / see 11:10-15).

In fact, when we examine this unit more carefully, we find that these mitzvot simply apply this theme of "ahavat Hashem" [the love of God] to the various situations which will arise as Bnei Yisrael will enter the land. To verify this, see 6:10,18; 7:1,13,16,22; 8:1,7; 9:1,4-6; 11:10-12,13-17, & 22-25!

Furthermore, note how the concluding parshia of this section promises Bnei Yisrael with a reward, should they indeed follow God with the proper attitude:
 "If, then, you faithfully keep – **ha-mitzva ha-zot** - that I command you, to **love** God.... to follow His laws... then God will help you **conquer** these nations... every foot step that you take will become your land [to its widest borders]. No man shall stand up against you..." (see 11:22-25).

This promise forms an appropriate conclusion to this **ha-mitzva** section, as God promises Bnei Yisrael His assistance in their conquest of the land, should they indeed keep the proper attitude towards Him.

And for a finale, the final psukim of chapter 11 (see 11:26-30) conclude this section by promising a **blessing** or a **curse** on the land, depending if Bnei Yisrael will continue to keep this "ha'mitzvah", once they settle the land.

[Note how the topic of this buffer section in 11:26-30 continues in chapter 27 (after the main speech is over); iy'h, we'll deal with this structure in the shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo.]

KRIYAT SHEMA

With this background, we can better appreciate Chazal's choice of the first two parshiot of kriyat shma.

Recall that the opening parshia of the **Ha-mitzva** section was none other than the **first parshia** of kriyat shma (6:4-9). Recall also that this section ended with the 'concluding psukim' in 11:22-25.

With this in mind, note now how the 'parshia' which precedes these finale psukim is none other than the **second parsha** of kriyat shma - 've-haya im shamo'a...'. [To verify this, review 11:10-22.]

In other words, the first two parshiot of kriyat shma form the **bookends** of the **ha-mitzva** section, for it begins with 'Shma Yisrael... ve-ahavta' (6:4-8) and ends with 've-haya im shamo'a..' (11:13-21).

This could explain why Chazal chose that we read **both** these parshiot to fulfill our daily obligation of Torah study [which is based on 6:6 - 've-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi metzaveh...'].

Based on this pasuk alone, one could conclude that we are required to read the entire **ha-mitzva** section on a daily basis. However, since this section is too lengthy, it is sufficient if we recite only its opening and closing parshiot. However, by reading these two parshiot, it is as though we have read (and hopefully internalized) all of the mitzvot included in this entire section. [The Mishna at the end of the seventh perek of Masechet Sota arrives at a similar conclusion in regard to reading Sefer Devarim at the **Hakhel** ceremony (see Sota 41a). There, instead of reading the entire speech, the custom was to read the first parsha of **Shema** (6:4-8) and then skip to the last parsha of **Shema** (11:13-21).]

SECTION # 2 - THE CHUKIM & MISHPATIM UNIT

Review once again the concluding psukim of chapter 11, noting the smooth transition from the **mitzva** section - to the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, noting the key phrases and theme: "... Now that you are crossing the Jordan to inherit the Land... keep these **chukim & mishpatim** that I am teaching you today" (11:31-32).

With this transition, we flow right into the opening pasuk of **section # 2**, which details these laws (see 12:1):
 "These are the **chukim & mishpatim** that you are to keep in the land which God gave to your forefathers..."

The many chapters which follow this opening pasuk contain numerous laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the land. However, in contrast to the laws relating to proper attitude in the **ha-mitzva** section, the laws in Section #2 are more specific in nature. For example, here we find laws concerning when and where to build the permanent bet ha-mikdash (chapter 12), dietary laws (chapter 14), laws of 'aliya la-regel' on the Holidays (chapter 16), laws about appointing judges and political leaders (chapter 17), and a full assortment of civil laws (see chapters 19-25). This list continues until the end of chapter 26. [Recall, that chapter 27 begins a new speech.]

As we should expect, this unit also contains a very appropriate conclusion:

"God commands you today to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, keep them with all your heart and soul. You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God, that you will walk in His ways... The Lord has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised, His **am segula**... and you shall be, as He promised [at Har Sinai] a **holy** nation to the Lord your God" (see 26:16-19).
 [The shiurim to follow will discuss the nature of this unit in greater detail.]

In summary, we have identified the two very distinct sections of the main speech of Sefer Devarim and explained the nature of their distinction:

(A) The **Ha-mitzva** section (chapters 6 thru 11) contains several mitzvot and various rebukes that encourage Bnei Yisrael to keep the proper attitude toward God as they conquer the land.

(B) The **Chukim & Mishpatim** section (chapters 12 thru 26) contains an assortment of more specific laws that Bnei Yisrael must follow once they inherit the land.

Now, we can suggest a reason for this manner of presentation.

THE PROPER BALANCE

So which section is more important? The **ha-mitzva** section - which deals with proper attitude [sort of like a **musar** sefer], or the **chukim & mishpatim** section - which details the specific mitzvot that one must keep [sort of like a **Shulchan Aruch**]?

[Any 'yeshiva bachur' faces this dilemma every time he sets up his daily schedule. How much time to dedicate to **musar** and how much time to **halacha**.]

The summary pasuk of Section #2 (quoted above) alludes to the proper balance between them:

"This day, God commands you to keep these **chukim & mishpatim**, and you should keep them with **all your heart** and all your soul..." (26:16).

This 'finale' closes not only the **chukim & mishpatim** section, but also beautifully relates it back to the **ha-mitzva** section. These chukim u-mishpatim must be kept **with all your heart and soul** - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha'.

[Note once again the textual parallel between this closing pasuk and the opening pasuk of the first section:

"ve-ahavta et Hashem Elokecha - be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha" - and you shall **love** God with all your heart and all your soul..." (see 6:5, compare with 26:16).]

This obvious parallel stresses how the specific laws of the **chukim u-mishpatim** section must be kept with the proper attitude of "**ahavat Hashem**", as explained in the first section!

Only with the solid base of "**ahavat Hashem**" is it possible to fulfill the more specific laws in the proper manner. And only with a comprehensive set of specific laws is it possible to maintain "**ahavat Hashem**" as a daily way of life.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. BACK TO HAR SINAI

To better appreciate this entire unit and its concluding remarks, we must recall that the mitzvot of this main speech should actually be considered an integral part of Ma'amad Har Sinai. [Recall from last week's shiur that God's original intention was to give these mitzvot directly to Bnei Yisrael immediately after the Ten Commandments!]

With this in mind, carefully read the final psukim of the speech, noting their thematic (and textual) parallel to the Torah's description of Ma'amad Har Sinai in Sefer Shmot (especially Shmot 19:3-6).

Note how these psukim reflect the covenant made between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai:

"... You have taken upon yourselves today that **He will be your God** and that you will follow His ways and laws..."

- God has affirmed on this day that **you will be His special people- 'am segula'**... as He spoke to you [at Har Sinai (see Shmot 19:5-6)]. And to set you above all nations to be His glory and Name (reputation)... that you shall be an "**am kadosh**" as He spoke to you [at Har Sinai]" (26:16-19).

Considering that these mitzvot are an integral component of Ma'amad Har Sinai, it is only fitting that Moshe concludes this speech by summarizing the most basic elements and purpose of that covenant.

B. SOME 'ADDITIONS'

Go through the **Ha-mitzva** section of Sefer Devarim (i.e. chapters 6-11) and try to determine which parshiot were 'added' now by Moshe in the fortieth year and which parshiot seem to be a word for word repeat of what God had first commanded him on Har Sinai forty years earlier.

1. Note that many mitzvot sound as though Moshe Rabbeinu is speaking to Bnei Yisrael as they left Egypt, and as though they themselves went out of Egypt and witnessed the plagues etc.

Does the above distinction explain this?

See 6:16, why is 'masa' the only or best example of a rebellion against God? When did this rebellion take place? Wasn't here a more recent rebellion? (e.g. Mei meriva...)

Compare 7:7-11 to 9:4-7, use the above observation to explain the apparent discrepancy between these psukim.

Why is chapter 8 clearly an 'add on'? Does this 'add on' fit in thematically to the main topic of the **Ha-mitzva** section?

C. TWO TYPES OF 'YIR'A' - A mini-shiur

As we discussed in last week's shiur, chapter 5 details the events which took place at Ma'amad Har Sinai when Bnei Yisrael were overcome with fear. In Sefer Shmot (see 20:14-18), we find what appears to be a parallel account of the same event. Let's compare them.

We begin with the account in Sefer Devarim, when Bnei Yisrael request that Moshe Rabbeinu act as an intermediary immediately after the completion of the Ten Commandments: "Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of God any longer, we shall die! For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? You go closer and hear all that Hashem says;

then you tell us everything that Hashem tells you, and we will listen and do it" (5:22-24).

God concedes to this request [note the positive aspect attributed to this fear]:

"I have heard the plea that this people made to you; they did well to speak thus. **May they always be of such mind**, to revere Me and follow all my Commandments..."

Sefer Shmot records a very similar incident that took place immediately following the Ten Commandments, which according to some commentators (see Ibn Ezra) describes the same event: "All the people saw the thunder and lightning..., and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance and asked Moshe: You speak to us and we will listen, but let not God speak to us, less we die. Moshe answered them: **Be not afraid**, for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be with you forever..." (Shmot 20:15-17).

Although Rashi and Ramban explain that this event (in Shmot) took place either before or during the Ten Commandments, for the purpose of this mini-shiur, we will follow Ibn Ezra's shitta which understands that both accounts describe the same event.

There is one major discrepancy between these two accounts: In Sefer Shmot, Moshe is not pleased with this fear, while in Sefer Devarim, God praises it!

It seems as though Moshe prefers that Bnei Yisrael confront God directly during Ma'amad Har Sinai, while God Himself endorses a more distanced relationship. Could this discrepancy reflect a dispute between Moshe and God regarding the value of fearing God?

An understanding of the two forms of 'yir'at Hashem' - the fear of God - can help us appreciate this controversy.

TYPE I: Positive (or Constructive) Fear

When one recognizes God's infinite greatness, even though he may be enthralled with the possibility of encountering the Almighty, out of humility he feels that it be improper to confront Him directly. This fear is commendable, for it reflects an ideal balance between possible closeness and necessary distance.

TYPE II: Negative Fear

On the other hand, a person not interested in any relationship with God would view a divine encounter such as Har Sinai as a nuisance, for it is meaningless to him. Fearful of its inherent danger, he prefers distance and limited responsibility. This type of fear of God, like a 'child running away from school', can ruin a relationship.

THE MACHLOKET

It seems that Moshe Rabbeinu, based on his experience with Bnei Yisrael since the time of the Exodus, is concerned that the people's fear stems from the latter reason. Therefore, he is unhappy with Bnei Yisrael's request that he act as their intermediary. He encourages them to stay at Har Sinai.

God, on the other hand, aware of the nature of man's haughtiness, stresses the positive aspect of this fear. He agrees with Bnei Yisrael's request, sends them to their tents, and gives the mitzvot to them thru Moshe instead.

Nonetheless, when the mitzvot of the main speech actually begin, we find a beautiful resolution of this conflict.

Because God is indeed aware of Moshe's worry that there is a danger of the distance caused by yir'at Hashem, God chooses to begin the mitzvot, which He gives via Moshe to Bnei Yisrael with the commandment of **ahavat Hashem** - the love of God! "Shema Yisrael... and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5). To counter this potential danger of 'too much **yir'a**', God begins with the mitzva of **ahavat Hashem**! The love of God and the

proper appreciation of His laws assure that one's fear will strengthen his relationship, rather than weaken it.

PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN - shiur #2

On his final day, why is Moshe Rabbeinu eager to see Lebanon?

And when he ascends the mountain for a final view, why does God show him a view of Saudi Arabia?

And why do Chazal interpret all of this as Jerusalem?

In this 'mini shiur', we'll attempt to answer these questions as we uncover the very first 'virtual' Jerusalem!

INTRODUCTION

In the opening psukim of this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu begs God to allow him to cross into the Holy Land (see 3:23-26). However, note how the manner in which he states his request is rather peculiar:

"Let me pass over and see this good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain **and the Lebanon**" (3:25).

We can understand why Moshe wants to see the 'good land', for that seems to imply the Land of Israel - as it was described in 'spy-report' by Yehoshua and Kalev:

"The land that we have passed to scout it, the land is very very **good**" (see Bamidbar 14:7).

[Note also 'asher avarnu'; compare 'evra na' in 3:25!]

But why does Moshe express interest to see Lebanon as well? True, Lebanon is located on the northern border of Eretz Canaan, but Moshe doesn't ask to see any of the other borders. Furthermore, why is Moshe only interested in seeing mountain ranges? What about the Negev, the Shefeila, and the coastal plain?

In fact, when he is shown the land (as recorded later on in Devarim 34:1-4), God shows him the Negev, the mountain ranges, and even the Mediterranean. Yet, in those psukim, Lebanon is not even mentioned!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain deeper motivation behind Moshe Rabbeinu's request.

A GREAT VIEW

As we all know, God does not grant Moshe's request. Instead, he instructs Moshe to climb to the top of a mountain to get a glimpse of the land that he is not permitted to enter. However, here we find yet another difficulty. Note the directions that God tells Moshe to look:

"Climb to the top of the mountain, and **lift up** your eyes to the **west, north, south** and **east** - and see with your eyes, for you will not cross the Jordan" (3:27).

Recall that Moshe now stands on Mount Nevo in the Moabite Mountains, directly east of Eretz Canaan. Hence, it makes sense that he should look towards the west, and even to the north and south, for that could be understood as northwest and southwest; but why would he look to **east**? After all, to the east, the only area in sight would be wide plains and desert areas of modern day Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

So why does God tell Moshe to look to the East?

The answer can't be that God wanted to show him the fullest borders of the Land of Israel, for Moshe had already seen them in his battle against Sichon, and furthermore, Moshe's request dealt specifically with the **other** side of the Jordan.

To answer these questions, we must note an interesting parallel between these psukim and similar psukim in Sefer Breishit.

THE SAME TOUR GUIDE

In our study of Sefer Breishit, we discussed the centrality of Bet El in Avraham Avinu's first journey to the Land of Israel.

His arrival in Canaan from Aram climaxed with his building of a **mizbeach** in Bet El, where he called out in God's Name (see Breishit 12:1-8). Similarly, upon Avraham's return to Canaan from Egypt, he ascended once again to his **mizbeach** in Bet El - to call out in the Name of God.

At that same time, Lot had decided to leave him, choosing instead the Jordan valley. After Lot's departure, God appeared to Avraham once again in Bet El, and reiterated His promise that this Land will one day become the homeland of his offspring.

However, note the special preface that God adds to this promise, and its similarity to our pasuk in Sefer Devarim: "And God said to Avram after Lot had left him: **Lift up your eyes** and **SEE** from the place where you are - to the **north** and **south**, **east** and **west**, for this land that you see I will give to you and your offspring" (see Breishit 13:14-16).

Note how God tells Avraham to lift up his eyes and look in all **four** directions from Bet El, just as He later tells Moshe Rabbeinu to look in all four directions from Har Nevo.

Of course, this parallel could simply be incidental, for this is usually the directions that one looks when he is on a high place. However, we find one additional instance where these four directions are mentioned, and once again in relation to Bet El.

THE FIRST BET ELOKIM

Recall when Yaakov Avinu was running away from Esav on his way to Aram, he stopped overnight at Bet El. There, God appeared to him in a dream, confirming that Yaakov would be the inheritor of His covenant with Avraham. In that blessing, note how we find once again all four directions:

"...And your offspring will [numerous] be like the dust of the earth, and you spread out to the **west** and **east**, **north** and **south**, and through you will be a blessing to all the nations on the earth" (see Breishit 28:10-15).

Here once again we find all four directions, and in fact these three sources are the only times in Chumash where these 'four directions' are found. However, this source concerning Yaakov is most significant, for when he awakes from his dream Yaakov makes a special promise concerning this site.

"And Yaakov awoke in the morning and took the rock that was by his head and erected it as a monument and anointed it with oil. Then he named this spot **Bet El**... and he vowed that when he returns... this monument will become a **Bet- Elokim** [House for God]..." (see 28:18-21).

These psukim establish a connection between this special site of Bet El and a House for God - a **Bet Elokim**. [In case you didn't notice, that's why it is called Bet El.]

This site was destined to house the bet ha-mikdash - that would become the symbol of the very purpose of God's choice of the Jewish nation. A site where man will be able to focus on perfecting his connection [through prayer] to God.

VIRTUAL JERUSALEM

With this background, we can suggest an alternate reason for both Moshe's request and for God's response.

Surely, Moshe wants to see the land, but not simply as a tourist; rather Moshe wants to see the achievement of the ultimate goal for Am Yisrael, as reflected in Yaakov's dream at Bet El and Avraham's vision from Bet El. When Moshe requests to see 'ha-har ha-tov' - the **good mountain** (3:25), one could suggest that he wants to 'see' the Temple Mount [note 'tov' in Breishit 1:4,10,12 etc.], and when he requests to see Ha-**Levanon** - he may be hinting not only to that northern mountain range, but to the bet-ha-mikdash that will one day be constructed

from the wood of the cedars of Lebanon (see I Melachim 5:16-32!).

In a similar manner, we can now understand God's response to Moshe. He instructs Moshe to climb to the highest mountain and to look out in all four directions, just as Avraham Avinu had done at the dawn of Jewish History. Moshe wishes to see the dream of God's promise to Avraham Avinu fulfilled, and God allows Moshe an experience that would reflect its fulfillment.

Moshe looks in all four directions for God has 'virtually' placed him in Jerusalem. With that vision, he can proceed to charge Yehoshua, for he will lead Bnei Yisrael into the land (see Devarim 3:28), and it will be his responsibility to make Moshe's dream come true.

Not only is this week's Haftara ('Nachamu') most fitting for the shabbat after Tisha Be-av, so too are its opening psukim of the Torah reading from Parshat Va-etchanan.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. See Rashi on Devarim 3:25. Note how our shiur attempts to explain the pshat of the drash that Rashi quotes!

See also Chizkuni on 3:25. How is his peirush different? How does he explain the connection between Levanon and the bet ha-mikdash (based on Yoma 39b!).

B. In your opinion, does Moshe also want to remain the leader of Bnei Yisrael, or does he just want to enter as [sort of a] 'rabbi emeritus', while allowing Yehoshua to lead the nation?

Which possibility does 3:28 support?

Relate your answer to Bamidbar 20:12 [& our conclusion in regard to this topic in our shiur on Parshat Chukat.]

Does God explain to Moshe why His answer is no?

If so, what is that answer? [Does it relate to 1:36?]

If not, can you explain why He doesn't?

C. Note the use of the 'shoresh' ayin.bet.reish. in both 3:25, 3:26 and 3:28. Does this shoresh have the same meaning in each of these psukim, or different meanings? Explain.

Now read Bamidbar 27:12-14 (see also 27:15-23).

In your opinion, is this the same story or a different one?

[How do these two accounts complement each other?

See Rashi & Chizkuni on 27:12.]

Now, note the name of the mountain that Moshe is instructed to ascend - 'Har Ha-avarim'. Note again the shoresh ayin.bet.reish!!

What is the 'real name' of this mountain - see Devarim 32:49!

Based on the above questions, why do you think that the Torah refers to it as Har Ha-avarim instead of Har Nevo?

Is there a geographical reason as well for this name?

See Ramban 27:12.

[Note also the use of ayin.bet.reish. in Bamidbar 27:6-11!]

Note also the use of verb 'latet' - to give - both in 27:7 and 27:12! (cute?)

Relate your answer to this question to the above shiur.